DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 752 PS 025 984

AUTHOR	Cartwright, Penny, Ed.; Kelly, Clare, Ed.; McLean, Kathy, Ed.; Mellor, Nikki, Ed.; Pidgeon, Sue, Ed.; Stevens, Judith, Ed.; Stables, Kay, Ed.
TITLE	Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC, 1996-1997.
INSTITUTION	London Univ. (England). Goldsmiths' Coll.
PUB DATE	1996-05-00
NOTE	100p.; Published twice per year. For the Autumn 1995 issue, "Parents as Partners," see ED 391 586.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC; n2-4 Sep 1996-Sum 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingualism; Book Reviews; Books; Caregiver Child Relationship; Childrens Literature; Conferences; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Vouchers; Foreign Countries; Infants; Inspection; Periodicals; Picture Books; Story Telling; Visual Arts; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Goldsmiths College (England); Great Britain; Italy (Reggio Emilia)

ABSTRACT

This periodical, from Goldsmiths Association for Early Childhood (GAEC), addresses a variety of issues related to early childhood education in Great Britain. Articles included in the Spring 1996 issue are: (1) "Traditional Story Telling in the Early Years" (Fiona Collins); (2) "International Focus--Early Childhood Education Programme: An Approach to Developing the Whole Child through the Arts" (Olga Kritskaya); (3) "Books for Babies: Views From an Under Five's Centre" (Nikki Mellor); (4) "1995 Annual Conference Report," highlighting recent research by Colwyn Trevarthen on communicating with infants; (5) "Minutes of the 1995 Annual General Meeting"; (6) "Member's Report: Child Development Society Conference 1995" (Anne Cooper); (7) "My Favourite Picture Book: Handa's Surprise" by Eileen Browne" (Judith Graham); and (8) reviews of two several children's books. The Autumn 1996 issue is titled "Focus on Assessment and Inspection" and discusses the effects of baseline assessment, desirable outcomes, and inspection of voucher-redeeming institutions on the quality of early childhood education. Articles are: (1) "Issues from Key Stage 1 Assessment" (Tabitha White); (2) "The Challenge of Inspecting the Under 5s--One Borough's Response" (Alison Ruddock); (3) "GAEC Seminar: Roseanne Simpson Talking about Ofstead and the Early Years" (Sue Pidgeon"; (4) "Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia" (Pat Gura); (5) "Nursery Vouchers" (Denzil Shepheard); (6) "My Favorite Picture Book: 'The Bear Under the Stairs' (by) Helen Cooper" (Marion Whitehead); (7) "Tracking Significant Achievement" by Vicky Hutchin (Nikki Mellor); (8) "Assessing Young Children's Writing" by Tom Gorman and Greg Brooks (Penny Cartwright and Judith Stevens); and (9) "Who Will Mind the Children?" by Save the Children (Judith Stevens). Articles included in the Summer 1997 issue are: (1) "Exploiting the Learning Potential with Early Years Children" (Gina Kent); (2) "Gender Differentiation in the Use of Construction Equipment in the Early Years of Schooling" (Judith Stevens); (3) "Using Information Texts with the Under 5's" (Nikki Mellor); (4) "Marian Whitehead--An Appreciation of our First Chairperson" (Geva Glenkin); (5) "Conference--Literacy and Bilingualism in the Early Years: European

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Perspectives" (Clare Kelly); (6) "Training Teachers for Kindergarten in the United Arab Emirates" (Shiam Badir and Mohammed Khalfan Al-Rawway); (7) "Report on GAEC Conference: Changing World, Changing Childhood" (Sue Pidgeon); and (8) "Aims of GAEC" (Pat Gura). Also included are reviews of the following books or other materials for young children and their families: (1) "Not Now Bernard" by David McKee (Anne R. Thomas); (2) "Flickerbook" by Leila Berg and "The Little Trials of Childhood and Children's Strategies for Dealing with Them" by Francis Chaput Waksler (Pat Gura); (3) "Early Literacy Education with Parents" [videotape] (Judith Stevens); (4) "Learning for Life: A Curriculum for the Early Years" by London Borough of Lewisham, Early Years Service (Clare Kelly); and (5) "So Much" by Trish Cooke (Gina Kent). (KB)

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Early Childhood Review:
Papers from GAEC, 1996-1997

Penny Cartwright, Clare Kelly, Kathy McLean,
Nikki Mellor, Sue Pidgeon, Judith Stevens, and Kay Stables.
Editors

Numbers 2-4 Spring 1996-Summer 1997

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Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC

no.2 Spring 1996

PS 025984

Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

GUIDANCE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC is edited by a small group of GAEC members. We welcome contributions to the Review (however small). Contributions can be sent on disc, typed or handwritten. If you prefer we will come and interview you! Please include photographs or copies of the childrens' work if you can.

We would also like contributions of childrens' drawings or work to include in the journal. Drawings are best if they can be photocopied (black or blue on white paper tends to be best).

Please include your name and work and/or home phone number. It is useful to keep a copy of your contribution.

Please contact or send contributions to:
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Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the new format Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC. This time the theme is general - we plan to continue this pattern of alternating the general and specific - assessment being the planned focus of our third issue. We have introduced three new sections this time. The first of these, the 'International Focus', gives insight into an early childhood education programme in Russia in which Olga Kritskaya writes about an experience which has art and culture at its heart. The second new section is one in which an early childhood educator writes about their favourite children's book. The first contributor to this is from Judith Graham, author of "Pictures on the page". The third section welcomes reports from members of any conferences, courses seminars and so on that they have attended and wish to share. In the first of these Anne Cooper reports back on the 1995 Child Development Society conference. We would welcome member's comments on these innovations and indeed any comments and suggestions for future developments.

While there is not a fixed theme to this issue, there are some clear threads running through. One of these highlights aspects of development in the very young with Nikki Mellor writing about books for babies and the conference report outlining recent research by Colwyn Trevarthen on communicating with infants. Children's books and storytelling is another significant thread. Fiona Collins writes about her research into using storytellers to develop children's language, especially that of bilingual children. For the first time the books reviewed are children's storybooks, and from the conference report we have the value of props in storytelling highlighted.

These are still uncertain times in early years education. We have been 'consulted' by SCAA on pre-school education; we have commented on 'desirable outcomes' and at this moment some four year olds are piloting their nursery vouchers. It is still not clear if these initiatives are to become long term. Perhaps what is clear however is the importance of continuing to keep the focus of the debate on the needs of the children and their families. It was good to see the success of the CAVE Rally in bringing the concerns over vouchers to public attention. GAEC is keen to contribute to this campaign and we would be very glad to hear from those who are experiencing the voucher pilot first hand.

Now that our publication is developing its own momentum and style we would like to ensure that the content reflects the views and experiences of all GAEC members. Consequently we hope that people feel able to contribute and to support this aim we have included some brief notes for contributors in the facing page. We look forward to hearing from you.

Clare Kelly
Kathy McLean
Nikki Mellor
Sue Pidgeon
Kay Stables
Editorial Group

Contents

Editorial	1
Traditional Story Telling in the Early Years	4
International Focus - Early Childhood Education Programme: An Approach to Developing the Whole Child Through the Arts	9
Books for Babies: Views From an Under Five's Centre	15
1995 Annual Conference Report	18
Minutes of the 1995 AGM	23
Member's Report: Child Development Society Conference 1995	25
My Favourite Picture Book	26
Book Reviews: Children's Books	28

Traditional Storytelling in the Early Years

Working together: two teachers, one storyteller, many children!

St. Albans Primary School in the London Borough of Camden is an inner-city school with eight classes, including a newly-built nursery. A year-long project has been set up there, using storytellers working with traditional tales from many cultures, with the aim of encouraging a richer, more descriptive spoken vocabulary in all the children in the school, but with a particular focus on the many bilingual children who attend. During the Spring term I have been working for one day a week as the storyteller in residence with the Reception class teacher, Frances Cowie, and the Year Two teacher, David Rowlands, who is also the language coordinator for the school. As teachers in a school where two-thirds of the children are bilingual, with over fifteen first languages spoken, they both place a great deal of emphasis on enabling all the children to become fluent and confident users of oral language. Using folk tales and legends from many lands, and exploring the stories through discussion, drama and visual art, we have been able to pursue their objectives in a lively and productive way. The storytelling sessions have been, as expected, an excellent stimulus for speaking and listening work.

This article describes two pieces of work, one from each class. From the Reception class, I focus on Joshua and his pictures, talk and dictated retellings in response to the story "Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle". From the Year Two class, I outline a drama session which followed the retelling of the Native American story "Grandmother Spider", with a particular emphasis on the important contribution made to the drama by the teacher in role.

The Reception class is a group of thirty children, all rising five, many of whom have had little or no preschool experience outside the home. I felt that it was very important to fit into the class routine as closely as possible, since school was so new for many of the children. On my first visit we began the morning with some songs and a story from me, and then a group came to draw with me and talk about the story, as one of the activities offered in this busy early years classroom. This seemed to work well, and became the pattern for our sessions together, which last from the beginning of school until playtime. On this first visit I told "Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle", a marvellous little piece for young children, combining a patterned, predictable narrative, in the best traditions of the folk tale, with the stylised and easily imitated hand movements of the finger rhyme. I have always found it to be a winner with children, for even the shyest will begin to join in with the actions, or offer suggestions for games which the characters can play. The story became a firm favourite with the class, and some weeks later, a group of six children from Reception came to the nursery with me to retell the story to these younger children. This was followed, after half term, by a most successful massed retelling by the entire class, accompanied by their teachers and me, for a whole school assembly. Now we are reaching new audiences, for Frances, the reception teacher, has decided to use the storytelling sessions to build home-school links, and parents are invited to come into the hall with us in order to hear a story with their children before leaving them at school for the day. Our first performance in this new initiative was another massed presentation of "Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle". This repetition, and the experience of retelling as a group, has been really beneficial in building children's confidence and understanding of the story, and we have seen children who were not ready to participate in the first retelling become

enthusiastic wigglers and wagglers. It is pointless to retell the story on paper, for it is essentially a story for telling, not writing, listening not reading, but the illustrations and retellings produced by one child give a sense both of the story and of his response to it. Joshua (aged 5.4 years) has drawn two pictures, after two different retellings of the story, and on each occasion after his picture was finished I invited him to tell a story for me which I scribed for him. I am always impressed by the ability of young children to compose spontaneously, and dictate their own stories, and particularly by their skill in dictating at a speed slow enough for the 'secretary' to write, without once losing the thread of the story. This ability is powerful confirmation of the importance of narrative and story as ways of thinking and making sense of the world. Joshua's two retellings show him using the story he has heard, the details he has included in his pictures, and his own store of knowledge about the world, to create a fluent and enjoyable narrative. His second version, produced after hearing and participating in retelling the story on three occasions over a six week period, reproduces with startling accuracy the narrative, vocabulary and intonations of my retelling, and furnishes proof of the contribution which hearing and retelling traditional tales can make to the child's skills of memory and narrative structure.

Figure 1;
Joshua's retelling

This is the stars. It is night time.
This is the house. It is golden.
This is the blue house.
They're going swimming and all the beautiful flowers are in the pool and the fishes are eating it. And there are bubbles coming out of the sea. The bubbles are coming out over the water.
And there is a monster in the house and Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle they are going
help! help!
And the smoke is coming out of the chimney.

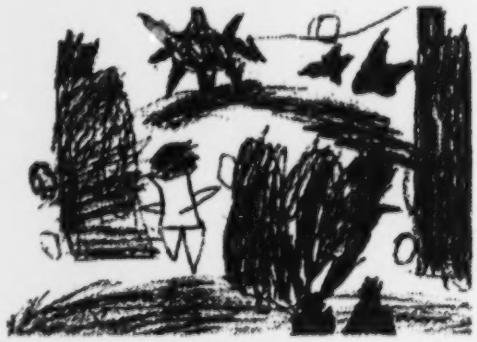


Figure 2;
Joshua's retelling

Once upon a time there was a house lived Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle and then Mrs Wiggle opened the door \POP\ and went out the door and then she went up the hill and down the hill until she came to Mrs Waggle's house.

She knocked the door but she knocked it medium and then she knocked it very loud

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

And then she said \OH NO\ and she went to her house.

And what did she do then?

Mrs Wiggle came to Mrs Waggle's house and she went

upthehillanddownthehillupthehillanddownthehill

till she camne to Mrs Waggle's house. and then she knocked the door loud and then she said \OH NO\ I have to go home.

and the next day Mrs Wiggle opened her door and this is Mrs Waggle opened her door and then they both went

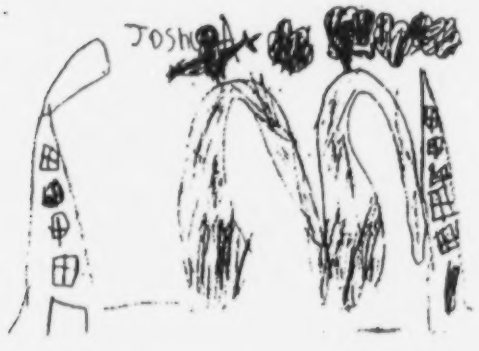
upthehillanddownthehillupthehillanddownthehill

and they both went

chatterchatterchatchat

and then they played a game.

and that's the end.



Joshua's first dictated story (see Figure 1) begins as a description of his picture, but soon his strong sense of the power of narrative takes over and he begins to create his own story from his picture, drawing on my retelling of Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle only for the names of the two characters. The second time we worked on this story he drew the two little characters and their houses, together with the hills which feature large in the rhythmic telling of the piece. This time his dictated story (see Figure 2) closely follows the story he has been listening to and retelling with his classmates, teachers and me, and reproduces all the essential features of the little narrative. This may at first seem a less creative activity than telling his own stories, but through retelling he has gained an understanding not only of the events and sequence of the story, but also of its structural features of rhythm, pattern and word play. All this embedded information will serve him well in his own future narratives, providing him with models and examples of his own to draw from. Neither creating new stories nor retelling familiar ones can suffice alone to provide the child with a full vocabulary of the language of story. When both activities are encouraged and given the opportunity to flourish, each complements and builds on the skills which the child is developing in the other.

In Year Two, working with a class of thirty six and seven year olds, we have developed a pattern of working during our afternoons together which begins with a story from me in the classroom, followed by a hall session of drama and games related to the story, which usually lasts between 40 and 50 minutes, until playtime. After play we sit on the carpet and tell stories and sing songs until hometime, with the children, the teacher and the storyteller all contributing.

In the first three visits I concentrated on Native American creation myths, and we spent a week working with the story of Grandmother Spider, in which various animals in turn try to bring back light to the dark world from a mysterious source belonging to the spirit people. It is Grandmother Spider who succeeds at last where the others have failed, in spite of being small, slow and old. In working on the story through drama I wanted to emphasise the value of co-operation, and also to explore with the children ways of obtaining the light other than theft, which is the strategy of the story characters. We set up pairs work in the hall in which each pair decided what animals they were, and then explored their ideas for trying to get the light through dramatic play together. Afterwards, in discussion in role, the 'animals' told us what strategies they had tried and whether they had been successful.

The class teacher, David, always participates in the drama, modelling for the children and encouraging them to see the work as a serious activity. On this occasion, both he and I felt that the children's contributions as we went around the talking circle were in need of enrichment. So when it came to his turn he took on the role of Gary, a very miserable gorilla - the first of the animals questioned to have been unsuccessful in the drama task of getting the light. As I 'hot-seated' him about his character and feelings the children quickly became concerned about Gary's plight and the focus of the next part of the drama became a quest to cheer him up, with offers of help, friendly overtures, and gifts. One of the most significant of the many presents offered to Gary was a book. When David, in role, asked whether he would be able to read it, as it would need to be in his own language, the children swiftly reassured him that it would, indeed, be written in gorilla. We were both intrigued by this notion of the book in gorilla, and before my next visit David gave the children the task of writing in role as the animals searching for the light, in order to make Gary's book. The children's unaided first drafts are lively and rich pieces of writing which have clearly benefited from the valuable language and thought promoted in the discussions and drama. Zara (7.2 years) was so excited by the character of Gary the Gorilla that she became Baby King Kong, demonstrating a knowledge of intertextuality that went beyond stories and books into film. She wrote not only of her adventures with her 'dad', played by another child in the class, but also of her feelings of sorrow about the 'theft', and her attempts to right the wrong: 'we gave them gifts'. Danielle (6.11 years), who chose the character of a snake for herself, wrote with great empathy for the character of Grandmother Spider, describing how she spoke in 'a little voice' and 'a quiet voice'. She was also at pains in her extended piece of writing to record Gary's feelings and her attempts to make him feel better: 'and Gary the Gorilla was sad and snake maked Gary the Gorilla happy.' The third writer, Luca (7.5 years), who identified himself as 'Lion', made a real effort to boost Gary's self image: 'I had problems with the box of light thats why I'm giving it to you. But you won't have problems with the box of light because you are a big big gorilla.'

Working in role is a powerful stimulus to children's creativity, providing the kind of structure and support which the familiar framework of the traditional story can also provide. These children have been enabled to draw on their own resources, to build on and develop starting points from the rich source of the oral tradition, and to work in equal partnership with the significant adults in their educational experiences. All this has contributed to the cultivation of a language-rich environment, a respectful and caring ethos in the classroom, and the growth of confidence and self-esteem in the children.

In these two classrooms, where the children's voices are listened to and valued, traditional storytelling, drama work and discussion have provided excellent contexts for the children to develop fluency and confidence as users of oral language. As a storyteller, I have been challenged and extended by working with these children and their teachers, and have greatly enjoyed and valued the opportunity to contribute. It is our hope that this report will stimulate other teachers, storytellers and parents to use stories and simple drama techniques to offer the children in their care worthwhile and stimulating language experiences.

Fiona Collins

Figure 3; Year Two letters
Zara's letter

Dear Gary Gorilla

Me and my dad went to sleep when every one was asleep we went to a camp we tried to get the light but they caught us then we tried again but they caught us again so we tried again and again until they were asleep we tried and we got it. My dad sent them away.

We were sorry we came to this camp that we took the light from then we gave them gift.

from Baby King Kong (Zara)

Danielle's Letter

Dear Gary the Gorilla

I went on this journey which had a dog in it and a spider in it too and a mecke(?) there was of snake I had to climb a tree because there was no light but there was a light in to a tree but none of the animals would not go to get it. But there was a little voice that went like I said I will go I will go in a sweet voice. The spider got the light and they carried it and Gary the Gorilla was sad and snake made Gary the Gorilla happy.

from snake)
(Danielle)

Luca's letter

Dear Gary

I will give you the box of light all of the light but I have lost it. I will get another box of light and I will give you a shivty(?) dunru(?) and 100 boxes dunrnus(?) When I went to get the box of light I scared them away but I had problems with the box of light that's why I'm giving it to you but you won't have problems with the box of light because you are a big big gorilla.

from Lion

Early Childhood Education Programme: An Approach to Developing the Whole Child Through the Arts

Olga Kritskaya
St. Petersburg, Russia

Summary
The Programme is an integrated, child centred, developmentally based Programme for four to eight year olds, with a curriculum drawn from a range of cultural aspects of the rich Russian tradition. Introducing the Russian cultural heritage is central to the Programme, and is integrated into the curriculum through art, music, movement and drama and combined with learning foreign languages and traditions.

'Love, Beauty and Action ... Give It To Them'

'Art is a single whole, one and indivisible ... How many young hearts are looking for something real and beautiful. Give it to them ... The time for creating the culture of the spirit has approached. We have observed the re-evaluation of values. Among the heaps of depreciated money Mankind has found treasures of world-wide value. The values of great art pass successfully through all the storms of global shocks ... When we say 'Love, Beauty, Action' we know that this is a formula of international language. This formula, belonging now to a museum and to a stage, should come into the life of each and every day ...'

Roerich 1938 p.65

I would point out the present application of these words, which seem as if they have been written especially about our times and concerning our modern painful problems.

During recent years I have been developing aesthetic education programmes from preschoolers (4-6 years) and elementary students (7-9 years). Different versions of the programmes are in use at three different schools in St. Petersburg - the Preschool (5-6 years), the Elementary School (7 years) and the Ethnic Cultural School (4-9 years).

Philosophy of the Programme

It is well known that the age between four and nine is the most important and the most responsible for the development of an active, creative individuality which is capable of further self-education. This is the fundamental goal of the Programme. Under the age of nine, the child's ability to perceive the surrounding world is unbroken and the entirety of a child's nature puts certain requirements on the education to be offered - it should be 'syncretic' or 'holistic':

- not divided into separate subjects;
- organised in an integrated environment;
- developmentally appropriate.

This will encourage children towards 'self-education' and encourage the development process of growing creativity according to the child's own nature. The advantage of such an approach is that it leads to the development of a harmonised personality which is not infected by the illness of today - 'the schizophrenic dismemberance' (Levi 1991) which shows itself in a divided consciousness in all aspects of life.

Research Methodology

The intention of our research is to establish the appropriate methodology and technology for the integral development of children between four years and nine, to provide the developmental conditions for fostering the child's own creativity and to define the educational conditions for regenerating creativity. I believe that the guiding principle of all education provision within an institution should be to bring culture, in all its aspects, within the reach of a child, enhancing the child's natural modes of complex integrated learning and fostering multisensory experiences in different learning activities, such as music, movement, art and drama. Through this we can build an integrated and harmonised environment.

The Programme could be called 'The Education of Feelings'. At the beginning of the educational process, while introducing children to the arts, I appeal to the child's faculty of feeling rather than to narrowly academic thinking. I am dealing mostly with the emotional sphere of the child's life. Coming in touch with the world of beauty and wondering at the beauty of the world enables a child to express him or herself, and thus to approach the understanding and feeling of being a part of the world and its cultural heritage.

Structure of the Programme

There are four different domains within the Programme.

Domain 1: Introduction to Folk Culture - verbal and musical folklore, traditional dance, crafts and modelling, folk theatre, ethnography, elementary history of Russian art.

Domain 2: Elementary Education in Musical Culture - learning to listen to music (listening/reproducing through art, drama, playing instruments), responding to a musical rhythm through motions and with musical instruments, learning correct modulations through vocal training, and musical education to bring a child to his/her own creative processes.

Domain 3: Movement/Dance - considered as the highest psychological state, as the response to the environment. Music itself is central, the development being seen as going from music to the techniques of the motion, not the other way round. This domain includes 'plastic' improvisations (improvising with the body), 'plastic' performances, learning dancing steps, and gymnastic improvisation.

Domain 4: Foreign Language - teaching a foreign language is considered to be a tool for accustomising children to the culture of the country and through this to world cultures. This makes it possible to resolve the tasks of ecological and peaceful education. This domain includes phonetic training, singing and rhythmic responding to a verse, introducing conversational formulas through activities, building vocabulary through storytelling, musical shows, pen-friends, history, geography and culture of the country and national festivals such as Halloween, Mother's Day, etc.

Each day of the week is supposed to be devoted to one of these Domains or a combination of them. I think such a division is reasonable from the point of view of the balance of the objects of activity suggested to a child within one day. At the same time, division into these Domains is relative while the forms of communicating with the children have much in common in all the Domains. It is communicating through music, movement, words and art so that each Domain is a dramatised combination of different kinds of developmental activities based on the emotions. The emphasis put on this or that way of communicating may be different. I would like to illustrate the structure of the Programme on the basis of the first Domain, initiation into the folk culture.

We should highlight first of all the treasures of our native culture, which is based on the folk culture itself. It is our own folk culture which may help us to learn the cultural language of mankind, which is common in its archetypal meanings, and helps us to understand and to respect cultural traditions of people of different nations and historical epochs. It also helps us to realise that our own culture is a component within world culture.

The deep assimilation of the native folk culture can be founded only in the early years of life. The holistic subject fits the integral personality of the child of this age and his or her ability to perceive the world unbroken. Perhaps most important is the fact that all the elements of the folk culture traditionally played the role of building a person quite naturally, thus giving a teacher essential advantages.

- The conformity of the developmental process to the child's nature preserves the spiritual health of the child, enables the child to feel joy and therefore preserves the positive aim of his or her life-being, encouraging the creativity which in its turn regulates the psychological functions at the time of building the child's notion around the surrounding world.
- The dramatically developing rite transforms the everyday prosaic consciousness into a festive one.
- Traditional games involve children in a competitive dialogue, promote the socialisation of children and their training of self-regulation of emotions. They also provide a wonderful area for creative cooperation and enlighten children about moral values.
- Participating in a game or rite is also a musical/rhythmical natural development, returning to the child's daily round a simple occasion for singing.
- When the child has realised the indissolubility of the life cycles of Man and the Natural World, he or she will realise the necessity of the preservation of natural resources.
- Touching natural materials (straw, wool, wood, linen, flax) when making first steps in weaving and modelling traditional articles, the child gets on a deeper level the special non-verbal information about traditional ways of being in contact with the environment. These steps also provide skills for enjoyable leisure.
- The syncretism of the word and motion also contributes to coping with the valuable meaning of the cultural object.
- Having been accustomed in early childhood to the world of native language, folk poetry, music, traditional movement, handicrafts correlated to each other, a child will enter the middle school prepared for studying the subjects of literature, history, music, language, arts as well as preparing an acceptance of the culture of other nations.

This Domain thus provides the conditions for revealing the creative potential of each child. It prepares a child for future self-dependence, helping a child to find their own orientation and reach harmony between heart and mind.

Technology

The integrity of folk culture makes it possible to combine within the frame of one session a talk, making children think about an aspect of culture and an assimilation of this through activities as children participate in action games or rites; respond to verses and rhymes in motion, reproducing their expression and rhythms; master elements of traditional handicrafts through creative work. This provides a situation where children accept such activities as part and parcel of the same session and through which meaning can be realised in the context of a certain topic. Each session can build an ethnic cultural environment.

Exploring the traditions of a culture in a modern day setting provides a good vehicle for helping children realise their creativity. It also allows the activities of children and adults to be interwoven with many different facets of present day life, with dynamic imagination becoming the crux of the development process. The task of the teacher is to provoke such imagination. Reaching this goal is likely to be possible through implementing theatrical (dramatic) techniques.

The developmental activities are designed within the frames of an indivisible scenario-like plan, the contents of which interweave and develop as the plan for each session is realised through a series of action-game sequences.

The structure of a school year appears in the form of a sequence of developmental situations, action-game sequences, designed in compliance with the rhythm and logic of the folk calender, providing a spontaneous calender of developmental play. Each month has general themes and the child's environment is organised around these central ideas.

Children's relationship with the teacher

How do the teacher and the children understand one another? Children take in the teacher's moods, warmth or coldness. This personal feeling is usually overlaid by something that catches their attention - by a rhythmic repetition of sounds or movements and compels them to follow the teacher. The element of breadth - the rhythmic repetition of what the children have grasped, along with using what each child brings with him or herself and a theatricalising of the process combine to create each session. The image of the ethno-cultural environment (rite, game etc) is built in compliance with active participation in the game, of the emotional 'infection' with the plot, as children live through the experience. This is why the scenic composition of an action game sequence should be considered a programme for emotional rallying, personal socialisation and for building collective emotions and inter-relationships. We are dealing with the complex of modes of teaching - contacting and provoking the play activity and imagination and linking this different work, development and communication situations.

The educational process would therefore be considered to be a theatricalised synthesis, being a thought-out system of expressive means, which stimulate the child's emotions and appeals to their faculty of thinking and 'willing'. As the year passes on, we see that session by session, week by week, children find their way into the world of folk culture, using the three faculties of thinking, feeling and willing in a way appropriate to their age. On the way they get skills for creative leisure and social adaption ('social technique of feeling' Vygotsky 1967).

By the means of such a theatricalised synthesis, the environment for interaction and its attributes is being built. I mean the interaction not only between children, but also between parents and children.

Parent involvement and its benefits

The notion of involving parents in their children's early education is not new. It is well known that collaborative relations between early childhood educators and parents yields fruitful results for both parties as well as for the children. This is especially true of learning through the arts - music, dance, painting, modelling, drama - ie when dealing with the education of feelings, addressing the emotional sphere of children. This coalition between parents and teachers can take place in several different ways. Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher in the subject, has identified five categories of parent involvement. (Kostelnik 1993)

- *Type 1:* Parenting - parents create positive home conditions that support learning
- *Type 2:* Communicating - parents receive and respond to communications from the centre or school regarding educational programmes and children's progress
- *Type 3:* Volunteering - parents assist teachers and children in classroom and/or outdoor activities
- *Type 4:* Learning at Home - parents monitor their children at home in learning activities that are coordinated with children's experience at school
- *Type 5:* Representing Other Parents - parents take decision- making roles on advisory councils and work for educational improvement

One could find all these types of parental involvement in children's education at the School of Global Consciousness, as well as at the Child Developmental Folk Centre 'Matitza' (both in St. Petersburg, Russia) within the frames of the Early Childhood Education Programme described above. The emphasis is, however, on the first three types. Family members (mothers, fathers, grandparents, older sisters or brothers) participate in the action-game sequences. Usually the session starts in a circle made by all the participants (the young ones and adults) who say 'Hello' to each other in different ways (new greetings games/songs/ jokes) look each other in the eyes and try to feel each other's inner world. They do this to come into close contact before 'living through' the plot of a spontaneous developmental play. The plot (or subject of the day) is of course predicted and thoroughly prepared by a teacher in consideration with the developmental task referred to by the Domains and sections of the Programme, but it is always open to be freely turned to any direction, peculiarity or nuance that the children or other participant sets themselves. Thus the plot could be improvised, but in compliance with the context of the day's special focus.

Such a freedom to improvise the subject suggested is very important for the children in learning to talk, to develop emotions and values and to make sense of their surroundings. The adults come to a shared conception of what 'good' education is - what it looks like, how it operates, what it requires (Hynes 1974). Parents involved become an important resource in the process. They significantly support the creation of the material and spiritual educational 'preparable' environment by participating in the action games with the children. There could not be any outside observers inside the session room who would not take part in the session. This gives harmony to the environment and integrity to the community.

A child observing his or her family member making contact with other children and adults becomes aware of the family member's cognitive and physical skills and creativity and learns some new individual aspects of the family member's character. Such joint learning makes it possible to address psychological problems in the family and encourages mutual respect. It enhances children's self esteem, their ability to self-regulate their emotions and opportunities to become more open with their parents. The teacher often has an opportunity to see much earlier if there is a problem in the family and to provide psychotherapeutic help.

These adaptive and corrective features of a spontaneous developmental process are inherent in a traditional folk action game or traditional rite ceremony. For this reason the Programme takes a lot from Russian traditional folk education.

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Books for Babies

Fortune Park Under Five's Centre is the newest of Islington's under five's centres. It is situated by the Barbican and was opened officially in October 1995. The centre has places for 9 babies, aged 3 months to 2 years, 16 toddlers, aged 2-3 years, and 40 nursery children, aged 3-4 years. It is open from 7.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. for most of the year, though most of the children come for part or all of the core day from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m.

Sandra Tucker is the Senior Worker at Fortune Park. She is based in the baby room when she isn't answering the phone, showing around visitors, talking to parents or doing the hundreds of other things that help to keep the centre running smoothly. She has been working there from its beginning. Before the first child arrived she and the headteacher, Caren Rudge, spent £2000 on books. Many of those books are in the baby room. Here Nikki Mellor, one of the two teachers on the staff, is interviewing Sandra about the reasoning behind the decision to make books an integral part of the babies' life at the centre..

Nikki "Why do you think it is important to involve babies with books? Why not wait until they are older and more able to understand how books work?"

Sandra "Having books is as important as having toys. Babies are learning all the time and much of what they know can be found in books. Everything about their life can be revisited via a book. This revisiting helps them to learn and understand at a deeper level. That's why we have books about babies being bathed, going walks, going shopping, etc. all situations that they know about. It's also important to get babies used to handling books, learning how to behave with books, valuing the special things that can be found in books so that they don't inadvertently destroy them. We teach them right from the start to value books. They enjoy them, enjoy the one to one relationship that often comes with them, and know they are useful interesting things."

Nikki "How did you choose the books you have in the baby room?"

Sandra "What I looked for was illustrations that my babies would immediately be able to connect with their experiences and ideas. A lot of them have photographs of babies in real life situations....there are lots of babies doing lots of everyday things. I specially looked for positive images in the illustrations.....Dads washing the babies.....illustrations that included all races etc.....specially looked for illustrations that would initiate talk."

"Of course I tried to buy durable books that would be easy to handle.....and I suppose what made me reject books were the kind of illustrations.....I didn't look at the text much because I assumed we'd 'make' the text with the child. I wasn't too worried about not selecting many story books. I knew we would have lots of good story books elsewhere in the centre and I assumed we would build up a collection here over time. I did get some simple books like 'Me Too' and they are very popular with the older babies who connect with the situations and enjoy the repetition."

Nikki "I remember Jodie (1yr. 1mth.) reading 'Me Too' to herself, imitating the noises of story reading .....no recognisable words except the occasional 'eeeouu-uu'."

Sandra "Yes. She used to 'conversationalise' like that before she began to talk, now its like she's going through that whole stage again in learning about storying."

18

Nikki "How do you use the books?"

Sandra "Books are available for babies all the time. We are waiting for a low book rack but at the moment the books are kept in a small cupboard. The more mobile babies get their own books and we read them as often as we can.....any time, any place. We introduce books to the youngest children several times a day. Even when very young they can sit on your lap, appreciate the pictures, enjoy the sound of the adult's voice and appreciate the intimacy of the situation."

"I like to encourage the use of books in their play too. When I set up I often put the soft toys in a ring as if reading books or the dolls on a cushion with books. Jodie and Hannah (1yr. 4mths.) choose to look at books all the time. Some of the younger children aren't ready to "travel" to get a book yet so we regularly share books with them. We often use books to help settle our babies. For example we have a photo book of Holly's family that we used all the time when she first came. We would always have it there to comfort her when she was missing home. When she was distressed we would look at it and this calmed her down. It helped her bridge that gap between home and school."

Nikki "What do you hope to achieve by introducing such young children to books?"

Sandra "We want to teach them to appreciate the joy that can be got from books. In the long run it will help them when they go to school but that's not the only reason we do it. We want them to think of themselves as readers. We want to make books an exciting part of their 'here and now'."

Nikki "What part do you see parents playing in this?"Sandra "Some parents were already sharing books with their children when they came and those who weren't very quickly saw their children enjoying books here. It's a message we want to get across, that books should be part of their growing and learning just as much soft toys, construction toys, sand, painting etc. Many parents know how important books are at a later age some do not realise how able very young children are. They are therefore surprised when they see their child responding so knowingly with their favourite book."

Nikki "And not just parents! I too am amazed at how able our babies are. Yesterday I saw Sardiah (1yr.1mth.) in the toddler's room with a book. She was sitting on the floor with it on her knee and I noticed it was upside-down. She looked at the book for a while with a puzzled look and I was wondering whether to help her when she put the book on the floor. She got up, walked around the book to the other side, sat down and looked carefully at the book. Then she smiled and began to turn the pages slowly, looking carefully at each page. She was still looking at the book several minutes later."

Sandra "We hope to set up a lending library for all our children and we'd like all parents to be involved. Being a new centre means there are so many things we have to get up and running but this is high on our list of priorities.

"Nikki "How do you make the new members of staff aware of the role and importance of books in the baby room?"

Sandra "We make sure this is covered in the interviewing of prospective staff and therefore select staff who can assure us of their understanding and commitment to the growth of early literacy. We plan provision together and books are a part of that planning and a focus for our observations both in the short term and the long term. Supply workers soon realise from the behaviour and direction of other workers that we are trying to create a flourishing literary environment and are usually more than happy to be part of it."

Nikki "Do babies have their favourite books?"

Sandra "Oh yes! Some babies will go to the same books over and over again just as older children do. Margaret (2yrs. 1 mth.), who has very little spoken language yet, loves one particular book. She uses the little language she has while reading this book....points when she sees the cup and makes drinking noises.....moos when she sees the cow .....she's already abstracting.....and she reads this book several times a day at the moment.

"We use lots of photos that we have taken of the children. We put them up on the walls near the floor so they can crawl over to see them. Later we make them into books. They get such pleasure from these. We also encourage parents to bring in photo albums and tell us about them with their child. Our babies learn so quickly and change so quickly and it's nice for all of us to look back at them.

"Nikki "Perhaps these photo books will enable them to develop a sense of their own history here at Fortune Park. Annual Conference Report

Annual Conference Report

Key Note Speech: 'First Contracts of Mutual Understanding: negotiating meaning and moral sentiments with infants', Colwyn Trevarthen

Professor Trevarthen drew out for GAEC members some of the most important points from his recent research. These points will be found in an expanded form in the references for this paper. The talk was richly illustrated with a fascinating range of visual material from photographs and videos of babies and children. He referred us for further details to two recent talks he had given (references at end of this report). He described his concept of social interaction of babies and young children with their parents as focusing on infants' capacities for interacting with other people's minds, and for forming bonds of companionship, which he would prefer as the term to use instead of 'attachment'. These conversation-like interactions take place through rhythm and sympathy.

Rhythm is defined as expressive behaviour in time whether musical, verbal, or poetic.

Sympathy is defined (as in the Eighteenth Century Scottish philosophers) as an innate capacity in people to feel, empathise, interact with others' feelings. Curiosity is included as a feeling as well.

He would prefer to use the term conversation for these interactions rather than language, as some linguists' definitions of language seems artificial and leads to marginalisation of 'mother-ese' and music. 'Text-consciousness' can lead to leaving out non-verbal communication. Human pretexts (in which both meanings are appropriate, since babies' personal initiatives often have a quality of diverting the focus to their own interest) follow a consistent path:

- neonates make use of imitation
- at 4 weeks primary intersubjectivity enables babies to make personal contact
- this is followed by improvised sequences between the participants which are much more subtle than mere turn-taking
- lastly, babies become both more bold and more timid as they alternate self-expression with periods of apprehension in which they experience the fear that accompanies learning what has been previously unknown.

The role of emotions

Emotions act as conversational regulators, and maternal depression can have a severely damaging effect at the crucial period before about nine months when babies do not yet turn to objects around them for stimulation. There is much playfulness in babies' behaviour at six months - Reddy has researched babies teasing their mothers, and Nakano has researched mothers teasing their babies. The role of the outside world in this dialogue gradually increases. As babies extend their focus of interest to objects near them, mothers include them in the conversation. These conversations are real narratives, and nursery songs, whose length of line is like music and poetry in conforming to spoken patterns, are the real base of linguistic syntax. At six months, babies are both bold and curious, and the games begin to need to have an element of danger about them.

Coherent babies

Babies are born as coherent persons with the qualities needed for these exchanges. They are born able to track objects moved slowly across their line of vision, and respond with their whole body. New babies' use of imitation is undoubted and later becomes a way of negotiating with others - Jacqueline Nadel in France has shown that babies in their second and third years imitate each others' use of objects as a social strategy. These coherent babies cannot cope with a lack of response. Murray's use of double television, in which a film of the mother interacting spontaneously with the baby is then shown again to the baby, has demonstrated how the failure of the mother's image to give the live response the baby needs causes the baby immediate distress followed by depression. However, the baby's growing awareness of objects means that at three months the stony regard of a depressed mother begins to become less upsetting.

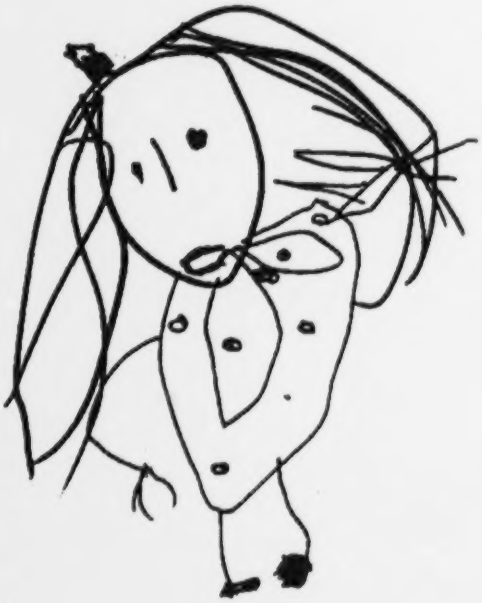
A rational zenophobia

The dependence of a baby on long-term relationships means that a stranger, however baby-friendly in general terms, is a great difficulty, and this, Professor Trevarthen believes, shows that we should see zenophobia itself as understandable. It is a catastrophe for a baby to be confronted with someone who does not understand the heritage of non-verbal communications built up with parents and long-term carers. It is only when this natural reserve about strangers is allied to prejudice about particular groups that we need to condemn it.

The whole-body response

Professor Trevarthen ended with a reminder of how babies show with their whole bodies their response to the rhythms of their dialogues with their parents. In commenting on video film of a mother singing to her baby who had been blind from birth he pointed out how the baby's arm movements were so closely linked to the rhythms of the song that they were like the movements of a conductor, in spite of the fact that the baby had never seen any human movement at all.

Concluding the session, Marian Whitehead expressed the excitement and appreciation that Professor Trevarthen's talk had aroused in GAEC members and thanked Vasu Reddy for having attended as well. Members were delighted to have the chance to benefit from having the opportunity to hear and talk to two such inspiring colleagues.



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Workshop Reports
On Being Picked Up and Linguistic Development

The workshop was based on research by Valerie Service reported in Language Development by Andrew Loch and Eunice Fisher.

Led by Kate Magliocco whose interest in this area was stimulated on an Open University degree in psychology. Kate outlined the theory contained in the research, which looked at the way in which parents picked up young babies influenced later linguistic development. The group explored through role play with dolls, the steps involved in picking up a baby and the interaction this initiated. The research indicated that these fall into two styles, that of functional and that of symbolic. Symbolic parents distinguished between the invitation to being picked up and the physical act, leaving a pause for the child to respond. Functional parents combined the physical act with the explanation without leaving a pause for the child to respond. In clinical trials, in a group of 30 Mothers, two thirds of the babies were picked up in a symbolic style. This style was innate and consistent.

Babies who were picked up in a symbolic style initiated their own pick up at 12 months, where as those picked up in a functional style initiated this at 15 months. During discussion the group, together with Kate, felt the issue was a lot more complex than the research suggested. The following factors also need consideration: different babies responded differently, due to personality and previous experiences and the responses of different carers. One of the group commented that as a carer you may be more symbolic as you are very aware of your own practice and cannot rely on innate behaviour as a parent might. It as also felt that functional babies may become more independent and focused on tasks whereas symbolic children may be more dependent on adults for their learning.

This was a very interesting workshop, especially for practitioners in this area and there was a call for more research especially in view of the implications this may have on daycare.

Play and Learning at Key Stage 1

Ann Chidgey who ran this workshop questioned whether there was a case for play at Key Stage 1 to meet the learning needs of children within the Early Years Curriculum and if it could be matched with the NC and OFSTED. Her beliefs were:

- Children construct an understanding of their world by generalising from direct and indirect experience
- Play plays a crucial role in this kind of development, providing children with a vehicle for exploring and reflecting on their preoccupation's and developing understanding
- Child's way of communicating with itself - thought in action
- It is a highly revealing way of communicating developmental progress to adults who choose to look She thought that three things were necessary to reconcile her understanding of how to make provision for children's intellectual development
- An understanding of the processes that children use in their learning
- A deep knowledge of the nature of what we want to teach
- A thorough knowledge of NC orders

She decided by comparing parallel classes [Rec/yr1], using their teachers, three nursery teachers and the Headteacher, to use observation as the principle means of gathering evidence. Employing a video camera and written recorded observations she continued to experiment with ways of observing and recording, with support from PIP. They set out to justify providing space, time, resources and adult support for play throughout Key Stage 1 by highlighting its role in the learning process and obtain an idea of a match between what they observed children learning through play and what was required of the NC.

In the work shop we watched the video with interest and formed groups to assess six different written recorded play situations and conversations between children which had been collected and analysed at fortnightly meetings between the researchers. From our discussion and observations, in agreement with Ann's research, formal recording of observing children at play in the classroom can influence our practice, helps us to watch and raise questions about our practice and how our provision can allow children to respond to it . It enables us to look at children's style of learning and how it develops. The final video observed, brought out clearly that sometimes a teacher's intervention in Key stage 1 play can be misplaced and create confusion. This was a good example of more formal observational recording that can teach us when to use play as an opportunity to teach or observe an await developments.

Although Ann's evidence has yet to be fully evaluated, the proposition that children do learn from play, Formal observation may prove that play in Key Stage 1 is, on balance, compatible with Early Learning Curriculum, NC and OFSTED and re-enforce her beliefs.

Reporter: Marcia Thelwall-Jones

"Shall I Tell You a Story?"

Choosing a workshop is worse than choosing a meal in a restaurant, but I knew I had made a great choice as soon as I walked into the room. It was a treasure trove of books, tapes and story telling resources that filled me with greed and eager anticipation.

There were lots of well-known books with accompanying story props. Some items were unique and precious, such as the hand made three bears set. Some were everyday objects that I could easily assemble myself - but never have! But this workshop will be the catalyst that will activate me into collecting and assembling story packs and, of course, letting the children get their hands on them.

We began by looking at the 'Early Years Reading Development Record' which was developed by Croydon Schools Advisory Service and adapted in liaison with Lewisham. This breaks down the reading skills, behaviours and attitudes of young children and groups them under headings such as 'attitude to books and stories', 'sense of rhythm and rhyme', 'use of illustration' and 'print awareness'.

Following this, three teachers shared ways of generating children's interest in and enthusiasm for books and stories. Nikki Oldhams brought along lots of well known story books, including several versions of the same basic story. She stressed the importance of adults modelling the use of story props, so that children understand that not only can they re-tell stories from books, but also develop their own versions and spin-offs. this ensures that children are actively involved in story-telling rather than just recipients of stories. An interesting example of children making their own story-telling materials was a delightful paper tower complete with a cut-out Rapunzel and long plait of hair.

Nikki's school had the benefit of GEST funding to support the development of story-telling packs, but Sue Hirschheimer got started with no special funding and so was an excellent example of what persuasion, persistence and enthusiasm can achieve. She described how she introduced the story props gradually, demonstrating their use and moving towards letting the children choose and use them freely. Involving the children in the care and storage of the materials was seen as vital. Sue also spoke about the interest and involvement of parents, both in helping to collect resources and also in using them with their children at home.

Thelma Perkins stressed the importance of seeking out story props which reflect our multicultural society. She introduced the special rag doll she uses as a way of communicating with children and sparking discussion. She also described how she sets up interactive displays to support story telling.

You can tell that I was inspired by the workshop, by the fact that I volunteered to write up this feedback - and also by the way I strode off to B and Q to buy cheap steel sheets for magnetic story boards.

Reporter: Lorraine Cook

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting: Saturday 14th October 1995

1. In her opening remarks Marian Whitehead (Chairperson) reported on the considerable success of the early childhood education projects based at Goldsmiths. She also reported on the very favourable feedback from members about the 1994 Conference, main speaker Professor Martin Hughes, and about the two GAEC seminars given by Geva Blenkin (Spring 1995) and Gillian Pugh (Summer 1995). She thanked members for their continued support of the conference and seminars. Marian informed members that she had taken chairperson's action and had responded on behalf of GAEC members to the consultative documents from SCAA, 'Outcomes for Pre- School Education', and from DFEE, 'Quality Frameworks for Institutions Receiving Vouchers'. Her responses had been posted on the conference noticeboard throughout the day for members' reference. Laura Timms proposed a vote of thanks to Marian for responding on behalf of members within the tight-time schedule given by both SCAA and DFEE.

2. Apologies for absence were received from Florence Beetlestone, Janet Douglas, Jenny Liggins, Sue Pidgeon, Bea Pompert, Salvatore Romagna, Trudi Schiferli and Judy Warner. Messages from members included a request from Eve Gregory to publicise a series of six seminars which will be held at Goldsmiths during the Summer Term 1996. The theme will be 'Early Learning in a multicultural Society' and the details will appear in the next newsheet. Members were urged to support the National Campaign for Nursery Education's lobby of Parliament on Wednesday 25 October 1995 to protest about the introduction of Vouchers for nursery education.

3. (i) The report and minutes of the last meeting (15.10.94) were accepted.

   (ii) It was reported that Janet Rose had acted as Treasurer since January 1995 (minute 4 refers).

   It was noted that the relationship between the Child Development Society and GAEC continued to be problematic. Laura Timms had resigned from the GAEC Steering Committee as she was unable to attend meetings, and so co-operation had not occurred (minute 8 refers). It was resolved to publicise the next CDS Conference (16,17 March 1996) to GAEC members.

4. It was reported that no nominations for officers had been received. All serving officers agreed to continue to serve during 1995-1996 except Janet Rose who was obliged to resign as Treasurer in December 1995 because she was leaving her post at the College. An urgent request for extra members was received from the Steering Committee to support, in particular, the newsheet and the review.

5. Officers were elected as follows:

Chairperson
Marian Whitehead

Secretary
Geva Blenkin

Membership Secretaries
Anne Cooper and Brenda Melville

Treasurer
Janet Rose until Dec. 1995 then vacant
(This post must be filled by a Goldsmiths' member of staff)

Overseas Membership
Vicky Hurst

Newsletter
Pat Gura

Co-opted member (newsletter)
Vicky Hutchin (see Item 4)

Editorial Group
Clare Kelly, Kathy Maclean, Sue Pidgeon, Kay Stables

Co-opted member (Editorial Group)
Nikki Mellor (see item 4)

Marian Whitehead emphasised that volunteers to join the Steering Committee, especially someone to act as Treasurer, were needed urgently.

6. (i) The secretary's report was tabled. It was noted that Marian Whitehead would be resigning as Chairperson at the 1996 AGM and that a new Chairperson was needed from October 1996.

It was also noted that creche facilities were not available at this year's conference. After discussion it was agreed that the association would subsidise places to the current cost and that the Steering Committee at its next meeting should consider whether support could be offered for home-based child care on the conference day.

(ii) The treasurer's report and audit were tabled. It was noted that the membership fee had been increased to £10 for full membership and £5 for student membership from 1996. The treasurer reminded members that the College could only pay in cheques which were made payable to 'Goldsmiths College'. Janet Rose was obliged to resign as Treasurer in December 1995 as she was leaving the College and this was accepted. Marian Whitehead, on behalf of members, thanked Janet for her support of the association.

7. No reports from members had been received.

8. Dates of future events were:

Thursday 7th March 1996 GAEC Seminar
Marian Whitehead 'Tell me about ...'
Analysing narratives in research, with particular reference to early years practitioners writing and talking about a quality curriculum.

Tuesday 21st May 1996 GAEC Seminar
Rose Anne Simpson 'Inspection and Early Education'

Saturday 12th October 1996 Seventh GAEC Conference and AGM
Professor Philip Gammage of Nottingham University will be the main speaker.

9. AOB
Laura Timms proposed that we empower Marian Whitehead to take chairperson's action to represent GAEC members on issues such as Government policy in the early years. This was accepted unanimously.

Olga Kritskaya, a GAEC overseas member from St. Petersburg, Russia, presented a short paper on creative and cultural education. This will be published in the GAEC Review.

Child Development Society Weekend Conference 29-30 April 1995
Anne Cooper

In April '95 the Child Development Society held a weekend conference in Brighton. It was suggested that GAEC members be invited to participate, but plans were delayed and it was organised too late for us to advertise it in our newsletter. However, as a GAEC member who could attend, I am reporting back to the membership on what was a first rate conference on all levels.

The group was about 20 in number and the speakers provoked much lively discussion. The theme for the weekend was "Diverse Morality, Shared Values" and opened with Iram Siraj-Blatchford's presentation on "Morals and multicultural education". She impressed on us the importance of the adult's role in maintaining children;s self respect. For example, in dealing with a racist comment made by a child, it is important to ensure that the response marks disapproval of the comment and not of the child. In addition, how we interact with others, for instance parents and colleagues, works as a powerful exemplar for children. "Disturbing behaviour in young children" - a deliberately ambiguous title - delivered by Martin Woodhead of the O.U. was extremely thought provoking. Research has shown that troublesome behaviour at 8 is the best indicator of delinquency at 15 or 16 and of course the problem behaviour has usually manifested itself at a much younger age still. A study in the 1980's among 3 year olds presenting behaviour problems indicated that 62% were still presenting problems at age 8. In other words, for a significant proportion the behavioural pattern was not just a developmental or passing phase. Since only 10% of children needing help actually receive it, it is hard to imagine the cycle being broken unless the social risk factors leading to problem behaviour are addressed, namely environment/housing, family/marital relationships, mother's mental state/depression and the mother's attitude to the child. All of these inevitably contribute to the way the child feels about him/herself and in return responds to those feelings.

Penelope Leach's delivery "Who's rights, whose wrongs?" highlighted the problems caused by children's 'unacceptable' behaviour. Any behaviour, she suggests, will present a problem if someone perceives it to be a problem. So often children are blamed for problems caused by adults. By changing the expectations adults hold of children, we can often change the behaviour.

Our final speaker was Peter Wilson, a child psychotherapist, who delivered an extremely disturbing paper, "Anxious children - their sense of rights and wrongs". Almost without exception, he claimed, all children know the difference between right and wrong. However, sometimes that sense of right and wrong is suspended and at the root of that suspension is anxiety. Young children are totally dependent on those around them for their very survival, the first 5 years affecting their sense of safety and consequently their ability to make progress. Parental absence, drunkenness and abuse all lead to deep anxiety, confusion, disorientation and betrayal. Anxious children become over concerned with survival so that their sense of right and wrong does not become internalised. Their anxiety can lead them to compulsive behaviour and to acting against their own interests.

We all came away feeling a tremendous sense of responsibility resting on our shoulders - how best to promote self esteem and a positive self image among youngsters in our care? I'm sure that all those of us who attend the conference are still searching for the answers.

My Favourite Picture Book

HANDA'S SURPRISE
Eileen Browne
Pub. Walker Books 1994
ISBN 0-7445-2541-1

This is my favourite book of the moment. I have read it scores of times to hundreds of people over the past year and am still enjoying it. The book is set in Kenya and the author acknowledges her debt to those who made it possible.

Handa is preparing a present of seven delicious fruits to take to her friend Akeyo in the next village. Off she goes, basket on head, speculating on which fruit Akeyo will like best. Now the drama begins. Unknown to her, and uncommented on by the narrator but seen by us, each piece of fruit is filched from her basket by seven different animals. Just as Handa is wondering if it will be the soft yellow banana that Akeyo likes best, we see a monkey in a tree above her and we know - yes we were right - that he's going to relieve her of this same banana. And soon throughout the book - on the left hand page, we see the full scene and anticipate the theft; on the right , a close-up confirms the worst. Readers start biting their nails at this point, anticipating poor Handa's dismal discovery. But a deus-ex-machina is at hand. Just as Handa is arriving at Akeyo's village with her now empty basket, a goat breaks free from it's tether and after a series of small frames showing his headlong charge, butts a tangerine tree. Can you work out where those ripe tangerines will fall? Of course you can, but if your eye should have failed to notice, the mound of tangerines is allowed to break through the frame to draw attention to itself. Akeyo's delight at the gift of tangerines, her favourite fruit, is only matched by Handa's surprise. The last image is of the friends enjoying the fruit; on the back cover all the village children tuck in.

As with Pat Hutchin's Rosie's Walk we have here a perfect example of the written text and the pictured text gives us different information. As we know the delight young readers experience in realising what is happening, ahead of the narrator and of the books characters, bonds them to the book and makes each rereading an exciting experience. Here, and in this sense the book is different from Rosie's Walk, the written text does something difficult for pictures to do and gives us thoughts. "Will she like the spiky leaved pineapple, creamy green avocado, or the tangy purple passion fruit?" This rich language must be welcomed in these days when picture book written texts are often severely pared down to avoid duplicating information. In Handa's Surprise, we also have a change of narrative voice from all- seeing narrator to Handa's interior voice. In addition, there is direct speech when the friends meet. Not a bad range in a short book for the youngest readers.

Not only is the picture book medium most properly exploited here, we have many other delights. The story is beautifully controlled and paced, the colours - yellows, oranges, blues - make you feel you're on holiday, the pictures are full of extra interest from the trailed tail of the monkey and his abandoned banana skin to the scores of insects and butterflies and details of village life , dress and hairstyles. A teacher of this area of Kenya says Eileen Browne has not put a foot wrong. End papers helpfully label the fruits and the animals. Both hardback and good paperback versions exist and are as beautifully designed as you would expect from Walker Books.

There are too few books with black characters of this quality; I hope this quite perfect book will reach as many classrooms as possible. I long to see the first classroom- made book which will retrace Handa's steps as she retrieves, stalks, stones, peel and skin and pieces together what happened to her fruits. Of course the children in the class should have a chance to eat the fruits first!

Judith Graham

Books Reviews - Tried and Tested Children's Books

A nursery teacher writes about the children's current favourite books.

HAIRY MCLARY FROM DONALDSON'S DAIRY

Lynley Dodd
Picture Puffin
0-140505318
£3.99

This book tells the story of a little dog called Hairy McLary who goes for a walk and is joined, one by one, by his dog friends on his journey.

As each dog appears their description is added to the rhyming text. Every dog is different in size, shape and colour. The children enjoy the repetitive text and are soon joining in and reading out loud together..." Muffin May like a bundle of hay...Hercules Morse as big as a horse..' and of course there is always 'Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy'.

The dogs are in for a big fright when they come across 'Scarface Claw the toughest Tom in town'. There are six dogs of different shapes and sizes but only one 'Scarface Claw'. What a surprise is in store!

A favourite story in the Nursery

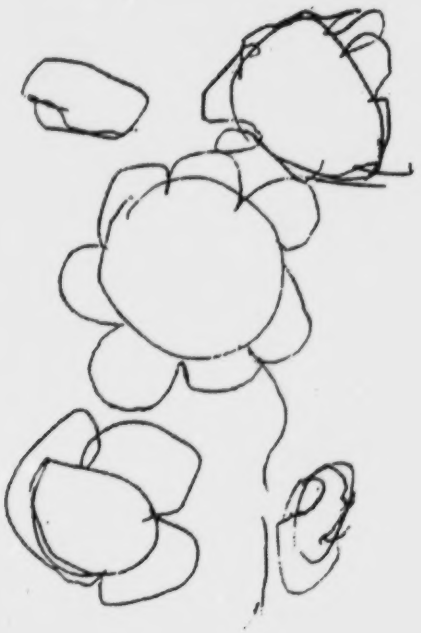
JASPAR'S JUNGLE JOURNEY
Val Biro
Picture Ladybird
0 7214 9643 1
£2.99

This is a story of a little elephant, Jaspar, who goes on a journey through the jungle to find his lost teddy bear. His search is beset with the antics of many unusual animals.

The story is beautifully illustrated , using a gentle blend of colour washes. Each picture has a subtle clue about the animal coming up next. The children enjoy joining in with the repetitive refrain 'What did he see?' and guessing which animal is going to be on the next page.

The animals in the story surprise and delight the children. They laugh at the lion wearing purple socks, the camel in dungarees and the giraffe without a care. But where is Jaspar's teddy bear? The story is satisfyingly concluded - after meeting the roaring tiger Jaspar runs all the way home where his mum and teddy bear are waiting for him. Another well enjoyed story.

Barbara Redworth



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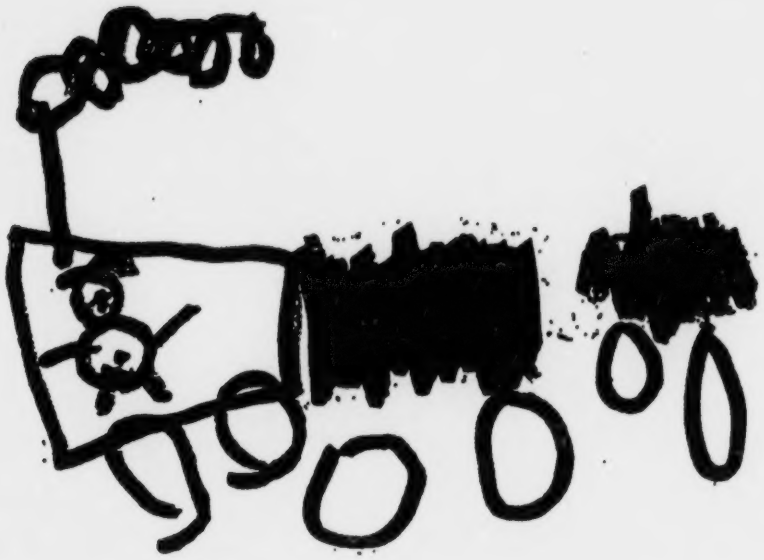
Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC

no.3 Autumn 1996



Focus on Assesment and Inspection

Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

GUIDANCE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC is edited by a small group of GAEC members. We welcome contributions to the Review (however small). Contributions can be sent on disc, typed or handwritten. If you prefer we will come and interview you! Please include photographs or copies of the childrens' work if you can.

We would also like contributions of childrens' drawings or work to include in the journal. Drawings are best if they can be photocopied (black or blue on white paper tends to be best).

Please include your name and work and/or home phone number. It is useful to keep a copy of your contribution.

Please contact or send contributions to:

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Editorial

This issue of the Early Childhood Review has Assessment and Inspection as it's focus. These both remain concerns, particularly in the debate around Baseline Assessment, Desirable Outcomes and the inspection of voucher redeeming institutions. All of these are worrying developments that have the potential to jeopardise the high quality early years provision to which we are committed. There are dangerous implications in models that try to reduce children's learning to simplistic, easily measurable statements. We must ensure that breadth is maintained in the early years curriculum and guard against the narrowing that has occurred at key stage 1.

The Baseline Assessment draft proposals are in all our institutions, and we are responding to them. Once again the format provided for this restricts any really purposeful comment. There seems to be an immutable commitment from major political parties to Baseline Assessment as part of a 'value added' measure of progress. There will be a more detailed analysis of Baseline Assessment in the next issue and we would welcome any readers' comments, views or experiences.

In this issue on Assessment and Inspection there are articles on nursery vouchers, inspection if the early years and assessment at key stage 1. There are also the regular features: an article with an international perspective and 'My favourite picture book'.

As in all areas of education there have been some changes afoot in GAEC. Sadly, at our annual conference, we bid farewell to our Chairperson Marian Whitehead. We are all indebted to Marian for her work and support for GAEC over the years. Our next issue will contain an appreciation of her work. We are glad to welcome Pat Gura as the new Chairperson.

We are also pleased to welcome Penny Cartwright and Judith Stevens to the editorial group. Also we are grateful to several people at the conference who indicated their interest in contributing to the review and we look forward to their contributions.

The next issue of this review will have a general theme and will be published in the Spring. We are also planning next Autumn's issue which will have a focus on Special Educational Needs and, as usual, we would welcome any contributions from our members. Guidelines for contributors are included on the facing page.

Penny Cartwright
Clare Kelly
Kathy McLean
Nikki Mellor
Sue Pidgeon
Judith Stevens
Kay Stables
Editorial Group

Contents

Editorial 1

Issues from KS1 assessment
Tabitha White 4

The challenge of inspecting the under 5s - one borough's response
A conversation with Alison Ruddock 6

GAEC Seminar:
Roseanne Simpson talking about Ofstead and the Early Years
Report by Sue Pidgeon 10

International: Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilio
Pat Gura 13

Current Issues
Nursery vouchers
Denzil Shepheard 16

My Favourite Picture Book
'The Bear under the stairs' by Helen Cooper
Marion Whitehead 18

Reviews
Tracking Significant Achievement by Vicky Hutchin
Nikki Mellor 20

Assessing young Children's writing by Tom Gorman & Greg Brooks
Penny Cartwright & Judith Stevens 21

Who will mind the children? by Save the Children
Judith Stevens 22

Issues from Key Stage 1 Assessment

Tabitha White

I have been involved in Key Stage 1 SATs from the beginning - in fact I was in one of the first schools that piloted Key Stage 1 SATs back in 1989 and have seen many changes over the intervening years. For the last three years I have been involved in the local audit-moderation team, first as a moderator, and then as the co-ordinator. This team has the dual role of providing support for Year 2 teachers in the process of administering the tests and teacher assessments and of ensuring consistency of judgments across the borough. We therefore run training for the headteachers, assessment co-ordinators and Year 2 teachers. We also visit 50% of the schools and collect samples of scripts from the other schools. This process is unique to Key Stage 1 and is paid for by government funding.

My involvement in the SATs from the start has given me an interesting overview of developments. It has indeed been fascinating to review the significant ways in which the assessments have changed over the years. The initial approach consisted of very worthy but time consuming teacher intensive tasks. No teacher who was involved in those early days will forget carrying out floating and sinking with small groups time after time. In fact the children themselves started to comment that the cork would certainly float, since it had on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday! These activities did give precious insights into children's understanding, and prompted many teachers to re-evaluate their perceptions of individual children, particularly those who might find it hard to record their findings on paper. However, it became clear that, although these tasks would be valuable as ongoing assessment activities, they were really unmanageable as statutory assessment which had to be carried out with all the children within a limited period of time.

Yet, this was not initially acknowledged and Key Stage 1 assessment continued to expand. In 1992, it was extended beyond the core subjects, into Geography, History and Design and Technology. In that year therefore, many schools boycotted the SATs. It became apparent, that if there was to be a future for statutory assessment in England, then the workload would need to be significantly reduced. In 1993, the scope of the assessments was once more limited to the core subjects. Then in 1994, reductions were made within the core subjects; in science, teachers were only required to carry out Teacher Assessments and not statutory tasks. In 1995, the moderation process was also reduced, so that it focused primarily on the statutory tasks and tests rather than Teacher Assessment.

In general, I feel that the assessment procedures at Key Stage 1 have changed for the better. They offer a compromise between manageable and meaningful activities. This is particularly the case in English. The process of conducting a running record on a child's reading and of eliciting a detailed response to the book has given teachers tremendous insights into individual children's performance in reading. Not only does this support teachers in their interactions with the children in question, it can also act as a form of training, developing their understanding of the complexity of the reading process. I was particularly impressed with the challenging nature of the questions which teachers are prompted to ask about children's responses to what they read. In previous years the questions tended to be relatively simple, asking children to talk about 'what happened in the book'. This year they were more rigorous and focused on the elements of plot, character and personal and critical response. Likewise, the guidance for the writing task gave clear examples of starting points for different kinds of writing which would encourage children to show their full potential. The reading and the writing tasks are

still time-consuming and the further subdivision of level 2 into grades A, B and C requires teachers to make fine and taxing judgments. This was a cause of great anxiety this year. However, I was impressed by how skilled Key Stage 1 teachers have become in analysing the work in order to make their judgments. The depth of understanding reached does mean that the time spent is not wasted.

In the case of mathematics, there are still issues around the organisation of the assessments. At level 2 and 3 children have a booklet to complete and this can cause problems when children need help in reading the questions. Teachers need to be very careful in the way in which they respond to children's requests, if they are to help them with the language, but not the mathematics. This means, that it is important to carry out the test booklet with small groups of children, which makes the administration time consuming. Having said that, the only people who perceived the problems were the teachers! The children seemed to find the booklet a most enjoyable exercise! This was not the case with the level 1 task. In an attempt to make some very simple maths concepts more interesting, the activities were made too complicated, and teachers often had to conduct them, holding fast to the instruction booklet with one hand, while manoeuvring numbered plastic shapes with the other. It was therefore, difficult to make the assessment feel like a normal classroom activity!

In the case of science, my response to developments is slightly ambivalent. I welcome the fact that there are no longer statutory test/task activities. Since science, by its very nature is such a practical subject, it is more appropriate to assess children through Teacher Assessment in ongoing classroom activities than in one off tests. However, since it is now only the tasks/tests which are moderated, this means that the same degree of support is not available for teachers in assessing science as it is in English and mathematics. If teachers lack confidence in science, there may be a tendency to be cautious and underestimate the ability of children.

Overall, although the development of SATs at Key Stage 1 has been a very painful and time consuming process for those who have been involved at the early stages, it has had a positive impact on teaching and classrooms. The emphasis at Key Stage 1 upon making the assessment activities as similar to normal classroom activities as possible, has meant that the process has had a positive impact upon teachers assessment techniques, without negatively driving the curriculum in a formal and narrow way. Although there are still problems, it is impressive how skilled Key Stage 1 teachers have become in assessing. In our borough agreement trials they are more confident about their professional judgments than teachers at other key stages, and their queries tend to be sophisticated quibbles about borderline cases. The opportunities for reflection and for discussions with other teachers and moderators have been beneficial to the profession and therefore to the children we work with. However, if these assessments are to continue to be reliable and if teachers are to gain the support which they deserve in conducting them, it is vital that the moderation process continues. Indeed I would ask for more than this, if all the core subjects have equal status, should it not be reinstated once more for science? And moderating Teacher Assessment in science would give teacher assessment the external validation it deserves.

Tabitha White is an advisor for assessment and for primary science in Lewisham

The challenge of inspecting the under fives - one borough's response

Allison Ruddock, Head of Under Fives in Islington talked to Sue Pidgeon about how they are currently grappling with the difficulties of providing a valid form of inspection for the Under Fives particularly in the light of the Integrated care and education provided in the borough.

Our main strategy in Islington is to improve the quality of education for all our children under five without compromising the standard of care. We are committed to improving the achievement of pupils at GCSE. Our own analysis shows that underachievement is not something that surfaces in secondary schools but that the patterns of underachievement are already evident in primary age children. Our focus has been to look at how we can support children's development from the early years onwards. Our aim for the Under Fives Service is to improve the care, the education and the learning opportunities for all children. We mean all children, including children for whom English is an additional language, and children with special educational needs. The level of language delay in the under fives is an area that our health trust has identified for concern. We are clear that our focus is on all under fives, not just three and four year olds.

We want to be sure that children are achieving their potential and in order to do this we need to support children's education from the start. Our aim is to encourage children to become competent, confident learners as they approach statutory school age. If children are confident and have experienced the pleasure of success in a learning environment they are more likely to maintain that positive attitude and to make progress in school. Although learning is a natural process, many children, sadly, do not experience the pleasure of success in an educational setting and so do not sustain their enthusiasm and motivation in learning. In order to better coordinate our services for under fives we have integrated them under the Education Department.

We now have ten Under Fives Education Centres. These were formally social services day nurseries but we wanted to make a more cohesive service that did not start some children off through a 'care' route without access to qualified early years teachers whilst their peers benefited from an 'education' route in nursery schools and classes. The need for high quality education is paramount for all our under fives and certainly we do not think, for example, that if a child is on the Child Protection Register their need for protection overrides their entitlement to a high quality education curriculum. These centres are run by qualified teacher heads, and have a staff team that includes early years teachers, under fives education workers and nursery support staff. They retain the extended opening hours of the day nurseries, but the space and the curriculum have been reorganised to meet the all round needs of the children. Similarly we wanted to remove the stigma of 'need' from the social service day nurseries, so these centres have much wider admissions policies. For example, whilst they have 30% of places for children referred by health and social services, the rest of the places are for children from the community. Some of these will be earmarked

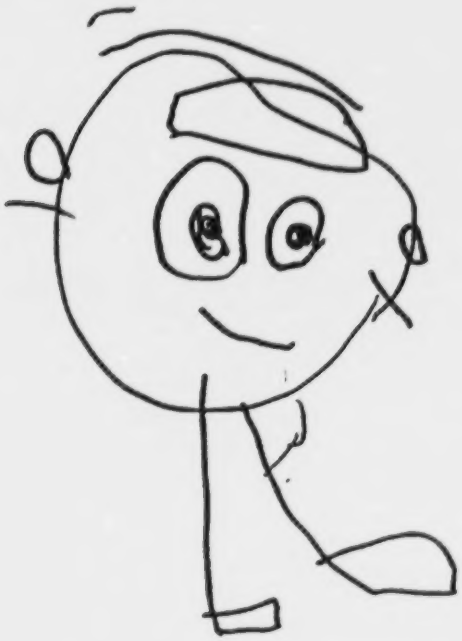
for children of council employees and teachers and some of the extended day places will be marketed at cost (so some parents could be paying up to £500 per month for their child's place). This cross section of intake, which reflects the local community, has served to raise the expectation of parents and standards for all children

The new centres are based on the premise that they should provide for high quality learning. We identified various key criteria for providing this quality service which were:

- an appropriate curriculum planned for the needs of individual children;
- effective adult intervention;
- record keeping to assess progress and share with parents;
- high quality advice, support and training so that adults become part of the learning environment;
- an appropriate system of monitoring or inspection.

The last area is the one I want to talk a little more about today. In order to be effective it is important for the institutions and for the authority that there is some kind of external evaluation against national standards. The institutions, I think, need some external eye to see how they are doing - the staff need to know how they are doing. They think it is good; but how does it compare with what others are doing? They need public verification that what they are doing is of high quality. Also they need to be able to evaluate their progress as an institution and to develop plans for future action. They need an opportunity to step back and look at where they are, to think about where they want to go and to develop strategies for getting there. As a borough we have committed substantial resources and need to know that they are being used effectively to provide a high quality service. We are accountable to the parents and to the public and so we too need some form of external evaluation. I think that we feel that an outside perspective, if appropriately focused can be a valuable and enabling tool. The problem that this has thrown up has been the gap in the current models for inspections of early years institutions. Since the Children Act (1989) all daycare providers are subject to registration and an annual inspection by the local authority. This inspection tends to set minimum standards for the premises, staff ratio etc but does not focus on the quality of the children's educational experience. Nor does it expect or require the institutions to produce an action plan and so does not necessarily provide the stimulus for raising educational standards. At the moment the Under Fives Education Centres are, in any case, exempt from these inspections because they are run by the local authority. This brings us on to Ofsted.

There are acknowledged problems with the Ofsted model with the under fives. The process anyway is not always enabling and for early years not always relevant. It is guided by the National Curriculum and has arisen out of a secondary model for inspections. It does not look at the full age range of our centres (0 - 5 years) nor the integrated care and education service that we are providing. At the moment the Under Fives Education Centres are not covered by Ofsted inspection requirements as they are established under social services rather the educational powers. Even the new Nursery Inspection Service with the focus on the Desirable Outcomes will still not be appropriate for the integrated service we provide or for the under threes.



At the moment there seems to be a vacuum in monitoring or inspecting this kind of integrated educational provision so we are seeking to devise something that will suit our needs. So far we have used our internal education inspection and advice service to monitor the Under Fives Education Centres, but this has not involved social services and also does not meet the Social Services Inspectorate standards which requires the inspection process to be independent.

We have been considering this situation and are now looking at establishing a joint care and education inspection process that will be appropriate for the whole age range. We have looked at models and practices from other authorities and we have now come up with a proposal that we intend to pilot this year. We are proposing to establish an inspection to be carried out in partnership jointly by an early years registered Ofsted inspector and an independent 'expert' in the inspection of social services daycare.

It is of course crucial that these inspections are both enabling and rigorous and so we have set out some underlying principles. These are that:

- the process should be the subject of consultation and be piloted;
- the education team should have appropriate early years experience to ensure credibility;
- there should be continuity of standards between nursery schools, nursery classes and Under Fives Education Centres;
- the standards of education and care must be appropriate for the whole age range from birth to five;
- the standards must incorporate the Nursery Education Scheme's self evaluation and the Desirable Outcomes;
- the process should be an enabling one and therefore linked to support;
- the inspection reports will build on self evaluations and the institutions development plans so that practitioners are active participants in the process;
- an action plan be produced and monitored internally and externally;
- the inspection report will be a public document and shared with parents;
- the process should involve parents and other agencies such as Social Services and the Community Health Trust.

We also propose to set up a working group representing the interested parties to devise the documentation for the process. We intend the inspection to be thorough and to cover, management and organisation, the quality of care, the curriculum and assessment, premises, equal opportunities, staffing and training and partnership with parents.

We also propose to allocate sufficient time to the inspection so that the two inspectors each have a day and a half to visit and collect information, two days to inspect, two days for report writing and then half a day to feedback to the staff. The centre will produce an action plan in the light of the report and this will be monitored after eighteen months through a return visit by the inspectors. We plan to involve a representative from the voluntary managed community nurseries in the inspection so that the process and standards can be disseminated and used for the benefit of the voluntary sector.

We hope and intend to have taken the most positive and useful aspects of existing care and education inspection frameworks and to have incorporated them into a holistic model that is both evaluative and informative and that will be part of the culture of self development within the high quality care and education provision for the under fives.

Roseanne Simpson talking about Ofsted and the Early Years

Report by Sue Pidgeon

Roseanne started by identifying the three areas that she would talk about which were firstly, the value of the inspection process as a developmental tool, secondly the impact of Ofsted inspections on the primary curriculum and thirdly their impact on the early years curriculum.

The value of an external inspection process

Roseanne identified what she saw as the strengths of a system of independent evaluation. She suggested that it is accepted that evaluation is an integral part of the education process but that what needs to be discussed is the nature of this evaluation. The process of school development planning includes the element of review, and the time to evaluate the planned outcomes. Inspection should fit into this process of school development, should be helpful to the school and give them an opportunity to look at themselves as others see them. She argued that a fundamental tenet of school development was that schools needed to identify what they did well and to work out how to move on. Inspections could either confirm or challenge the school's view but a good inspection should be a mutually beneficial experience leading to heightened professional discussion. The inspection process was a sensitive, subtle and complex process in which the involvement of others was critical.

This was confirmed by the Ofsted report on action planning which found a connection between how successful the school was in implementing its action plan and how positively the school saw the inspection as an evaluating tool, as well as how satisfied they had been with how the inspection was conducted. Roseanne acknowledged that the Ofsted model had significant weaknesses, and particularly felt that its implementation as a checklist without dialogue had detracted from its usefulness. She felt that, as schools developed confidence in the process, they would demand more professional dialogue, and that this would be beneficial to the process.

The impact of Ofsted inspections on the Primary curriculum

Roseanne identified two main areas of difficulty in the initial implementation of Ofsted inspections. Firstly that the problem was not with the inspection as a process, as accountability was always part of education, but more that the inspections were being carried out by teams who may or may not have had experience of primary education and/or inspection as a dynamic process. As a result the outcomes of some inspections were questionable.

Secondly that the model for inspections was rooted in a secondary 'subject' model and that this caused confusion for primary schools and had pushed them into a model of planning and teaching that mirrored the inspection framework with subjects and lesson timetables. Roseanne acknowledged that the primary curriculum had taken an enormous bashing in the first year of inspections but more optimistically she felt that the revised framework allowed for more dialogue and flexibility for the inspection team to work with the way the school was organised. She felt that the school's increased confidence in how they were working should redress some of the initial difficulties as they will take more control of the inspection process. She reiterated commitment to the research that underpins good primary practice and argued that schools are regaining their confidence particularly at KS1, confidence in how they manage the curriculum both to ensure breadth and balance and how they link it to individual children's development. She used three examples of changes at KS1, to illustrate schools' return to confidence in what they are doing. Firstly she suggested that the National

Curriculum and associated GEST courses had allowed KS1 teachers to develop subject knowledge and to move away from a narrow 'basic skills' curriculum. She also suggested that teachers were less anxious and more confident about returning to methods they found educationally valid. Finally, that the work on school development meant that Headteachers now reviewing their schools' progress, were more knowledgeable about their school and knew which aspects were strong and which needed developing. This meant that they had the professional expertise to challenge Ofsted judgements if necessary.

Ofsted and the Early Years

Roseanne started by explaining that initially the early years had been lumped under the same framework as all other phases, and that although Ofsted had published a paper outlining areas of learning to use in early years inspections, this information had not gone to schools. This and the dearth of early years inspectors on teams had caused much dismay amongst early years practitioners.

Previously the emphasis from Ofsted in primary inspections was KS1 and 2, but now the political arena has moved to the early years, or "Pre School Education" as Ofsted had decided to refer to it. The introduction of Nursery vouchers and Desirable Outcomes had set the seal on political lunacy in the early years. From September 1997 all early years institutions were to be inspected against the Desirable Outcomes, and from now on voucher redeeming institutions were being inspected against Desirable Outcomes.

Roseanne ruefully noted that nursery education had come of age at last and was suddenly considered so important that it had to have outcomes and be inspected for validity! She suggested that early years practitioners would have to decide whether they let this limit provision or would try to use it more positively to pull all early years institutions up to the quality of the best.

She acknowledged that the Desirable Outcomes, although in some ways linked to areas of learning were full of potholes some of which were quite dangerous, (like the use of upper and lower case letters). There was the risk that institutions, anxious about being validated would teach to the outcomes, and that this was particularly worrying when we know that many of those teaching in the early years do not have early years training. She suggested that there could be some solace from the section entitled 'common features of good practice'. She recommended that we look at the scope of this to ensure that, as thinking curriculum planners we maintain the confidence and determination to put into practice what we believe is the right education for young children. In this context she drew our attention to the work on the process of early years education and particularly to the work of the Goldsmiths Principles into Practice project, and the work of Geva Blenkin, Vic Kelly and Tina Bruce. She reminded us that the early years curriculum rejects the notion of content, and she reiterated the importance of play, of exploration, challenge and humour. She exhorted us not to be too worried by the 'blue book' of Desirable Outcomes but to remember that what we see going on in nursery classes and schools is of very high quality with children achieving at very high levels.

She concluded with a plea, a plea for a time when:

- we will see a curriculum set up for early years learning;
- childhood is seen as valid in itself;
- child initiated activity is valued;
- there is recognition of what the child can do;
- evidence of achievement is gained from records, from observations.

She argued that these underpin high quality provision, and give children opportunities to struggle, to practice, to wallow, to be collaborative or solitary, to experiment, to be imaginative, to work and play. All these take place in good early years settings with teachers' observations, commentaries and records providing the evidence that these high quality 'outcomes' are being met. She concluded by suggesting that early years practitioners need not let the current situation be 'done to them' but must continue to demonstrate widely their confidence in the process led curriculum.

Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia

Pat Gura

Last year, I had the privilege of visiting the Italian town of Reggio Emilia, famed for its parmesan cheese, balsamic vinegar and its municipal Infant Toddler Centres and Preschools catering for children aged 0 - 6 years. Reggio Emilia is situated in the Emilia Romana region of Northern Italy, and has made the largest financial investment in social policy, particularly regarding children, than any other region of Italy.

As a small provincial town off the tourist trail, Reggio Emilia has more than its fair share of visitors. Whilst lunching in one of the town's mediaeval piazzas, a local man at a nearby table greeted us with some amusement: 'Not more teachers!'. The numbers of early childhood educators wanting to make the pilgrimage to Reggio Emilia has reached such proportions that there are fears that the work of research and development which are the hall mark of the Reggio Emilia approach will suffer. Some cutting down on the numbers of visitors seems inevitable. The good news is that negotiations are in hand to bring to the UK the travelling exhibition *The Hundred Languages of Children* which illuminates what can happen when children, parents, teachers, administrators and politicians are in harmony about the meaning of education. The irony for British visitors to Reggio Emilia is that so much of what is to be seen there is reminiscent of British primary education in the Plowden era!

The Hundred Languages of Children

Symbolic representation, particularly drawing, painting and model-making holds a central position in the Reggio Emilia approach. This recognises and seeks 'to liberate childhood energy and capacities' (Edwards et al, 1993, p.16). It is to do with enabling children to use their own unique ways of seeing, knowing and speaking rather than insisting on the exclusiveness and correctness of our adult world view. Symbolic representation is seen as the means through which children make sense of their experiences and reach increasingly higher levels of understanding. An idea is visited and revisited many times, using different media to capture different attributes and aspects, with adults and children working together.

Small, same-age groups, working with an adult are seen as the optimum context for learning and every child is given the chance to take part in an in depth research project each term. Year-groups stay together for three years with the same adults.

Early childhood educators in Reggio Emilia see themselves and the children as co-researchers. Child development is studied within the contexts of the projects which they set up and explore with the children. Sometimes these are initiated by the children and sometimes by adults. Within and between the different establishments they are creating data bases about how children think and learn under these conditions, not only for the present but for future reference. At the start of a project, they are interested in finding out what children know and can do without assistance. A developmental map is created using photographs and statements made by children as they engage with materials, ideas and each other.

This information provides the basis for judging the help which children at different stages need in order for them to move on. This second part of the process may involve direct teaching. By our relatively hands-off approach, this can go beyond what many practitioners here would find acceptable, to the point of holding a child's hand to guide it through a movement it cannot yet make unaided.

My informant in one school described to me how she had gone about researching with the children problems relating to the creation of vertically erect figures in clay. Firstly, the children's 'natural', or untaught strategies were plotted photographically and children's understandings and problems discussed with them. On the basis of this data, the problems were presented to the children in the form of a project: each child would make a 3D chair in clay. Weeks of activity followed with children studying and discussing chairs, the number of legs needed, the relationship of chair legs to the ground, to each other, to the seat, to the backrest. The finished product, regarded as equally important to the process was a cabinet full of 3D chairs in great variety, no two chairs exactly the same. This collection, together with the 'before' photographs, observations and recordings of discussions and of the research as it progressed, form a permanent display for the future reference of children and adults. The ongoing project in the same school related to the children's understanding of the composition and decomposition of the quantity 'five'. This was being explored through a game of shop. As the children interacted with each other as shopkeeper and shopper, their present understandings were charted as a prelude to later teaching, by the adult who watched, tape recorded and made notes of the children's untaught strategies. The approach seemed to be an intriguing appropriation and combining on Montessorian, Piagetian and Vygotskian theory.

Valuing both process and product

Many of the displays around the schools and centres are permanent, enabling children and adults to engage with the history of their schools as they in their turn contribute to it. The products of these endeavours do not seem to be regarded as the physical property of individuals and therefore everything tangible which results from an activity remains in school as part of the individual and collective data-bank. This is a policy well worth our consideration, in my view, which could help to create a more dynamic understanding of products than that which sees them as an 'end'.

Documentation

This is what we would see as record keeping. As data is collected, it is posted up on the walls with explanation and comments from children and adults. In Reggio Emilia records are shared between schools and this provides the basis of ongoing dialogue about theory and practice in which members of the community at all levels become engaged. Apart from its research value, this making public of the records is seen an aspect of accountability. On one famous occasion, to alleviate concern and suspicion about the teaching methods adopted, the late Loris Malaguzzi, who headed the early childhood team, took the preschools into the market square so that the citizens could see for themselves, exactly how the children were taught. This same spirit is behind the open documentation.

Would it travel?

There is lots for us to ponder about the approach to early childhood education in Reggio Emilia. For themselves, the early childhood educators of Reggio Emilia are most anxious not to be seen as having an 'approach' unless it be that of 'research'. They see themselves as engaged in a dynamic process which changes in the light of their researches. They worry when they hear visitors say they like this or that aspect of the whole and they remind us that unless we see the relationship of the parts to the whole, we are missing the point. Early childhood education in Reggio Emilia is built on a system of relationships and cannot be seen merely as a collection of parts bolted together as ours is rapidly becoming.

You can now read an account of early childhood education in Reggio Emilia in the book entitled *The Hundred Languages of Children* edited by C. Edwards, L. Gandini and G. Forman, published by Ablex, London. A collection of slides and articles can be studied in the Early Childhood Archive, Froebel Institute College, Grove House, Roehampton Lane.

Pat Gura, the new Chair of GAEC, lectures at Roehampton Institute London

Nursery Vouchers - a headteacher writes about his school's experience

Broadwater Primary School is a school of over 500 pupils from 3 to 11 years of age. It is situated in south west London and has a distinctive mutlicultural intake. Approximately 70% of its pupils come from ethnic minorities, mainly from the Indian sub continent. Many of its pupils learn English as an additional language. The school's section 11 allocation is the largest in the LEA being over 4.0 fte teachers.

I feel that right at the beginning of this article I need to record my personal and professional opposition to nursery vouchers. But my own views notwithstanding, I am convinced that for the community of Broadwater Primary School the introduction of nursery vouchers has not proved helpful. Overall our experiences show that new bureaucracy has been created which chases pieces of paper around so that the school should receive the money it has previously received from the LEA.

The "Nursery Voucher Dance" goes something like this:

Step 1: The Nursery Voucher Agency (using the Child Benefit database, which is only about 75% - 80% accurate), sends vouchers to parents of those children who are eligable.

Step 2: Parents bring them signed to school (or come to school and sign them). They are then countersigned by the Headteacher. Part of the voucher is returned to the parent, part kept by the school.

Step 3: The part kept by the school is eventually forwarded to the LEA, but only after the information has been entered into the school administration system.

Step 4: The LEA forwards the vouchers to the Voucher Agency.

Step 5: The LEA then receives the money which is credited to the school budget.

There are no additional or new monies made available by this scheme. In the first year, because our LEA was involved in the pilot scheme, a small grant was provided for administration costs, but this is no longer available. The only way to ensure that we receive the exact amount of money to which we are entitled, is to make sure that every child who is eligable for a voucher, redeems them. At present our LEA is funding schools on the assumption that every voucher will be presented to each school for redemption. However, any short fall will be deducted from our school budget for the new financial year in April 1997. I do not believe that we have gained or lost one child because of the introduction of nursery vouchers. The choices that our parents have made are positive ones. They choose to send children to our school because they want to, because they like what we offer.

We have gained nothing by the introduction of this scheme. Our nursery and reception classes are full, in fact we have a waiting list for each group, but because we are anxious to ensure that we maximise the money available to our school, we have needed to charm, pressurise, plead with, beg and persuade parents to apply for and bring in their vouchers.

Efforts we have made have included individual letters, personal contact between teacher, headteacher and parent (even though there may be more important things to discuss with parents), and telephone calls. (I have even telephoned parents from home in the evening to be sure of speaking with them.) No matter how careful and sensitive we try to be, some of what we are expected to do has not been helpful in establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relations, particularly for those parents whose first child initiates their first experience of school.

Because of our LEA's Early Years policy children can begin nursery class after their third birthday. This means that some nursery and reception class terms qualify for vouchers, but other terms do not. For some reception class parents the information about *nursery* vouchers seems irrelevant. Parents sometimes disregard the information - and the vouchers!

For nursery class parents their first term may not be "voucher-eligible". Other terms will be. Equally some reception class terms need vouchers, other do not. Thus a child has begun school but suddenly, midway through the year, they are told they need vouchers in order for their child to continue at a school they may well have chosen for her or his entire primary school life.

For parents and children for whom English is not their first language, the whole process becomes even more bewildering. Although the DFEE has explanatory leaflets in many languages, there is so much information to be provided and absorbed when a child begins school, that voucher leaflets just add to the volume. We have a number of staff, parents and friends who help us with spoken and written translation in order to ensure that we welcome, genuinely welcome, everyone who is new to our school. So at Broadwater, we decided that nursery vouchers would not change our priorities. We would continue to welcome children and parents and focus on the educational needs and interests of each individual child and their family, although we realise that sooner or later we would need to ensure that every eligible child's voucher was brought into school.

Even for those parents whose first language is English, but who have difficulty with reading and writing, the arrival of the nursery voucher can present an unhelpful, embarrassing or intimidating obstacle. Some families have also found difficulties when the vouchers have not arrived. Child benefit is increasingly paid directly into bank accounts, dispensing with the need for benefit books containing regularly checked addresses. Many of these families did not receive vouchers as addresses were often out of date. Two families who contacted the Voucher Agency were told their children did not exist!

This has proved particularly troublesome if children's birth certificates are from overseas and in a non European language. Only properly, (legally) attested copies have proved acceptable, and this has just added to the pressure and difficulties, all of which are irrelevant to a child's education - particularly so at the very beginning of their school career.

In spite of all the difficulties mentioned we have managed, so far, to collect all the vouchers needed although the school itself needed to apply on behalf of some parents. But it has been at some cost. Time has been spent which could have been more effectively used in other areas. In addition to teacher and headteacher time, school admin officers have needed to devote extra time to the voucher process. And in spite of all our efforts, I do not believe that the introduction of nursery vouchers has improved the quality of parent-teacher/home-school relations.

At the end of the day we continue to have full classes, with any luck the identical amount of money we would have received before nursery vouchers were introduced. I can't help wondering when the demand for increased education spending seems never to have been greater, what my school and other schools could have achieved with the money being devoted to the administration of a scheme that seems to have made so little difference to anything that school communities regard as important.

Denzil Shepheard is Headteacher of Broadwater Primary School, Wandsworth.

My Favourite Picture Book

THE BEAR UNDER THE STAIRS.
Helen Cooper
Doubleday, 1993;
Picture Corgi, 1994

Marian Whitehead

My favourite picture book is a kind of 'moveable feast' as the object of my picture book passion changes constantly. In fact, I'd be challenged to restrict myself to eight picture books for that other desert island where discs are not allowed! But at this point in time I must confess to being in love with The Bear Under the Stairs.

I am under the spell of a big pear-shaped bear with a provocative grin who squeezes itself round a door and onto the cover of the book, transfixing me with a mischievous eye. An eponymous character who squeezes round doors and bursts out of the frames of the illustrations is a striking feature of this book. I have learnt recently that the frame-bursting device is called 'bleeding'(Doonan,1993) but I have to say that this particular bear does not ooze or flow. It erupts out of every picture and into the centre of the life of the child in the book, as well as into the world of the reader. This is a wonderful metaphor for the hold the bear has on the mind and imagination of the young child in the story.

The story can be summarised in these terms: a small boy, William, is scared of the dark cupboard under the stairs and believes that a bear lives there. William secretly placates the resident bear by throwing food, notably a pear to start with, into the cupboard and slamming the door firmly shut. Eventually, the stench of rotting food forces William to confess his fears to his very supportive mum. Brave William and fearless mum spring-clean the dark place under the stairs and appear to find no signs of the bear.

This account, however, does scant justice to the exuberant picture narrative which gets going well in advance of the more restrained text. The visual narrative starts on the title page as the bear disembarks from a boat, carrying two well-travelled suitcases and a green umbrella, and steps forward out of the frame towards the reader. On the publication details and dedication page - 'For Ted' - the bear waits at a bus stop and on the opposite full picture page he is already marching up a garden path while the bus drives off in a flurry of mud.

The first double-page picture spread introduces young William, small and hunched with anxiety as he goes up the stairs, his red-dungareed figure followed by his enormous and almost bear-shaped shadow. The door under the stairs is shut but it is already splashed with mud and a green umbrella is hanging on the door handle. The first words of the subtly rhyming text are squeezed into the top right hand corner of the picture spread:

William was scared of grizzly bears,
and William was scared of the
place under the stairs.

A detailed analysis of this book could take up many column inches but all the readers, children and adults, I have shared it with comment on certain key pictures. There is the fearsome drawing of a red-fanged and bloody-clawed bear done 'by William' and the drawing of William 'by Bear' in which our red-dungareed hero is a rudely gesturing scamp. But the heart of the book may well be the double-page spread of William's house drawn in cross-section and depicting the bear having a wonderful time at night while everyone sleeps. Bear plays with a train set in the attic; jives around to the music on the Walkman in William's big sister's bedroom; cooks a pile of pancakes in the kitchen; watches a late night 'Superbear' movie on TV; dresses up in mum's best clothes; soaks in the bath and slides down the banisters. Is this another powerful metaphor for children's longing to know what the big people get up to at night after they are banished to their rooms? It certainly depicts a child's resentment about early bedtimes and a longing to have fun and do mildly naughty things.

When mum and William tackle the bear in its lair under the stairs they only find a furry rug, a broken chair and smelly food scraps everywhere. But who's that hiding behind an old screen? The text tells us that William gets a little toy grizzly bear of his own to love and he is never scared of bears again. At one level we know that this is a book about children's imaginary fears of dark places and the long hours of darkness, which they often populate with large and unpredictable creatures. But we all have our own dark places, monsters and inarticulate fears, so this cheeky bear speaks to all of us. In fact, if we return to the book we can see that the bear has only 'gone away' and is already parachuting down to another house in the final picture.

Perhaps you should check your cupboards and dark places, just in case...

Marian Whitehead has recently retired as Chair of GAEC

TRACKING SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS
Vicky Hutchin
Hodder & Stoughton
ISBN 0-340-65478-3

Nikki Mellor

Being a Nursery teacher is like being a juggler. Every day the balls go up in the air and there we are, juggling. We take into consideration the social and emotional growth of individual children. We provide and monitor the environment so that it can cater for our pupils' development as learners. We try to develop an organisational structure that can be easily fitted into the needs of the institution, the child, the parents and carers and the teaching adults. We assess the understanding of our pupils, decide how to encourage the next step, provide a wide and balanced curriculum. All these balls and many more are all up in the air at the same time. So any book that claims to help early years teachers develop an effective system of assessment which is child-centred, manageable and useful as a formative tool is certainly worth looking at.

Tracking Significant Achievement in The Early Years by Vicky Hutchin is a very practical book.. It is based on good early years practice and the first two chapters explain, simply and clearly, what this means. It argues that we should be focusing our recorded observations of children on those that show a leap or development in their progress .It then proceeds to show how these significant achievements can be used .

A framework is provided that has at it's heart the aim of the child becoming part of the evaluation process. The argument for why this is crucial and how it is to be achieved is coherent and logical. The organisation of the framework appears to be as manageable as any I have seen and far more useful as a formative tool.

Significant achievement is described in terms of physical, social and process skills, attitude and conceptual development and covering all aspects of the traditional early years curriculum. The chapters showing how this system works are full of examples collected by staff in nursery classes, nursery schools and reception classes. They vividly speak for themselves of the usefulness of this method of tracking achievement. These chapters answer many of the basic questions that immediately spring to mind when considering a change to this way of working. It is a well planned book written by someone who obviously appreciates the huge diversity of pressures that today's education workers face.

Our centre is trialing an assessment and reporting scheme from our L.E.A. which may become little more than a complicated exercise in reporting achievement without that element of developing children's ability to become aware of their own achievements. During the first few weeks of this term I have been trying out some of the ideas from the book. I am now acutely aware of how difficult I find deciding what is a significant achievement when we have few past bench-marks to start from. That will become easier with time and experience. Encouraging children to recognise that what they have done is significantly better than their previous efforts and helping them find out why this leap has happened is a much more difficult process. I am not used to being systematic in such discussions. Initiating them is fairly easy, but getting a 3 year old to reflect upon their reasons for success and making sense of their responses is a different matter. I still have a long way to go but I'm now sure that this is one of the elements that is missing in our present assessment procedures.

In conclusion this is a book that I would recommend for all those who work with young children. It is an organisational tool that takes the complex nature of our role and rearranges its parts into a pattern that potentially liberates us to spend our time with children in a more focused way. It argues it's case clearly and well; starts from the first principles we recognise as the basis of good early years practice and will help us in our task of furthering children's learning to the best of our ability.

Nikki Mellor

WHO WILL MIND THE CHILDREN ?
A guide for those setting up their own childminding schemes
Save the Children
£2.50 16 pages
1 899120 36 X

Reviewed by Judith Stevens

This A5 booklet outlines the development and progress of childminding support in Manchester, which resulted from the partnership between Save the Children, Manchester City Council and Manchester City Childminding Association.

The document offers clear practical advice for those who are considering setting up childminding support schemes and covers topics such as: 'subsidised childminding; developing drop-ins; lending toys and hiring equipment. Each section includes checkpoints about implementation and issues to be considered to ensure quality is maintained.

All of the information is presented in a coherent user-friendly style and will undoubtedly be a valuable resource for the targeted audience.

ASSESSING YOUNG CHILDREN'S WRITING
A step by step Guide
Tom Gorman and Greg Brooks
NFER /The Basic Skills Agency
£4.00
72pp

Reviewed by Judith Stevens and Penny Cartwright

This guide is aimed at teachers of young children and parents. It is a well presented, attractive full colour book which uses annotated examples of children's work as the basis of the content. The authors identify seven stages of writing development, but acknowledge that this is not the only way of looking at early writing.

The framework has been developed as part of research for the Agency on Family Literacy. The authors worked with over 600 children aged from three to seven.

The evidence presented in the guide consists of examples of children's writing made in response to specific tasks set by the teacher. This unfortunately limits the type of work sample included, since there are no examples of spontaneous early writing made during role play or 'for a purpose'. One of the stated aims of the research was 'to produce the highest stage of writing that each child was capable of, independently'. A section which included ideas for developing the provision to support children's independent writing development would have been welcomed.

In our opinion, the implication that copying is an essential stage in all children's writing development raises concerns that some adults may not value children's own writing achievements at all stages.

Overall, the book provides some interesting examples of children's work and the adult comments would be a very useful resource to be used as a starting point for group discussion.

Penny Cartwright is the Early Years Advisory Teacher with Lewisham Early years service

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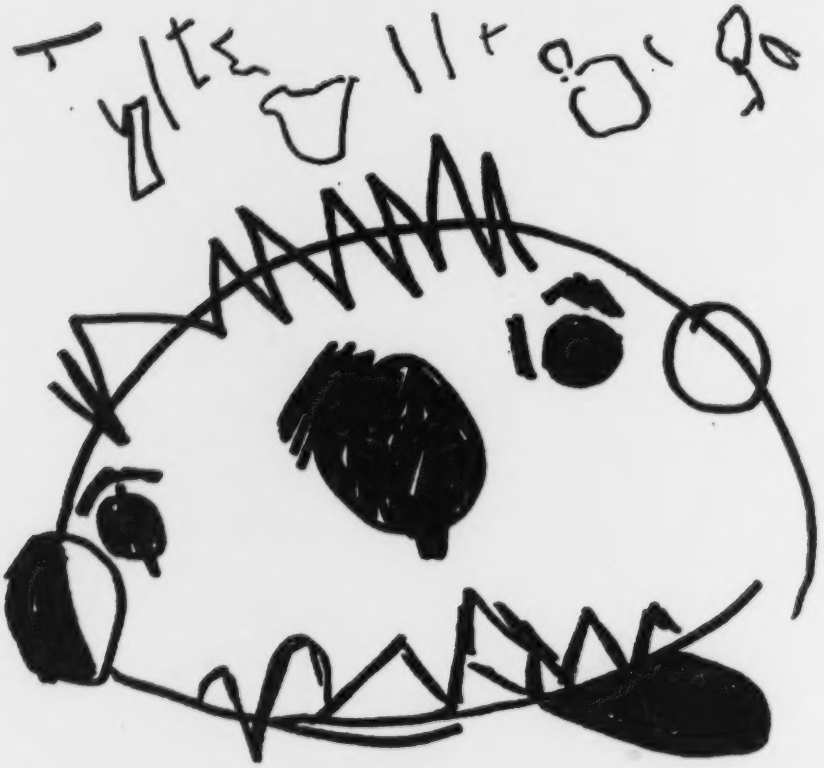
Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC

no.4 Summer 1997



"I'm going to eat you up roared the troll"

Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

HOW TO JOIN GAEC

GAEC activities include

- Annual conference (Autumn Term)
- Seminars and workshops (Spring and Summer Terms)
- Publication of Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC (twice a year)
- Publication of a directory of members and their interests within the early years filed, to encourage the formation of networks and research groups among members.

Annual membership subscription (giving reduced rates at conferences and seminars and copy of Papers from GAEC)

£10.00 full membership
£5.00 student membership

For a membership application form contact

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GUIDANCE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC is edited by a small group of GAEC members. We welcome contributions to the Review (however small). Contributions can be sent on disc, typed or handwritten. If you prefer we will come and interview you! Please include photographs or copies of the childrens" work if you can.

We would also like contributions of childrens' drawings or work to include in the journal. Drawings are best if they can be photocopied (black or blue on white paper tends to be best).

Please include your name and work and/or home phone number. It is useful to keep a copy of your contribution.

Please contact or send contributions to:

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Editorial

In this issue of Early Childhood Review, Pat Gura outlines the aims of GAEC. She reminds members of GAEC's overriding educational brief. Among the variety of topics covered we are treated to Anne Thomas' favourite picture book and a thought provoking article by Nikki Mellor about choosing information books for under fives. She also encourages readers from GAEC to recommend non-fiction resources which they have found successful in their classrooms. The international section contains a report from the Institut Europeen pour le Development des Potentialities de tous les Enfants (IEDPE) UK conference to which GAEC is affiliated and also a paper by Pr. Dr. Sham Badr from the University of the United Arab Emirates who some members may remember from the GAEC conference last October.

GAEC continues to hold two seminars and a conference each year. Bernadette Duffy was the speaker at a very successful evening in March on a curriculum for under threes. An abstract of her presentation will be published in our next issue to launch a new regular section on under threes. Contributions from readers will be welcomed. Please remember that if you're too busy to sit down and write, we would be very happy to come to interview you.

Since our last review, the issue of baseline assessment has become steadily more of a reality as next year, all reception class teachers will be required to report on the performance of their four and five year olds soon after they arrive in school. SCAA's guidelines on baseline assessment are now available and we will be returning to this more fully in the next issue. We would really like to hear about your experiences and concerns on this very important matter and so would welcome contributions from members.

Another recent development that will affect early years education is the publication of proposed new Standards from the Teacher Training Agency for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status, which include new specialist Standards for those training to teach 3-8 year olds. This development demonstrates a new commitment to professional qualifications in this area and we plan to include a review of these proposals in the next issue.

Finally, can we remind readers that in our next issue we will have a particular focus on Special Educational Needs, and again would welcome contributions on this very important area.

Penny Cartwright
Clare Kelly
Kathy McLean
Nikki Mellor
Sue Pidgeon
Judith Stevens
Kay Stables
Editorial Group

Thanks to Eliot Bank and Christchurch nursery classes for the drawings and Chelwood Nursery School for the photos.

Contents

Editorial

Information Technology:
Exploiting the learning potential with early years children
Gina Kent ?

Tigers on the Duplo Tower
Judith Stevens ?

Using information texts with the under 5's
Nikki Mellor ?

Marian Whitehead - An Appreciation of our First Chairperson
Geva Blenkin ?

International
Conference: Literacy and Bilingualism in the Early Years: European Perspectives
Report by *Clare Kelly* ?

Training teachers for kindergarten in the United Arab Emirates
Pr. Dr. Siham Badr & Dr. Mohammed Khalfan Al-Rawway ?

Conference Report
GAEC, Changing world, changing childhood
Report by *Sue Pidgeon* ?

Aims of GAEC
Pat Gura ?

My Favourite Picture Book
'Not Now Bernard' by David McKee
Anne R. Thomas ?

Reviews
'Flickerbook' by *Leila Berg* ?

'The Little Trials of Childhood and Children's Strategies for dealing with them'
by Frances Chaput Walker
Pat Gura ?

'Early Literacy Education with Parents'
A framework for practice by University of Sheffield/Sheffield Education Authority
Judith Stevens ?

'Learning for Life - A curriculum for the early years by London Borough of Lewisham
Clare Kelly ?

'So Much' by Trish Cooke
Gina Kent ?

60

Exploiting the learning potential with early years children

Gina Kent

Background

Although my career in teaching is short (currently in my third year), I have begun to realise more and more the great learning potential that Information Technology can have for early years children.

I myself am no expert, exposed to IT in the wider world, as we all are, to traffic lights, cash machines, supermarket scanners etc. I have used IT as a tool to word process and within libraries for research purposes.

Children and Information Technology

Children are able to use, explore and exploit IT not only as a creative tool but as a catalyst for negotiation, cooperation and for the raising of self confidence and esteem. Children all need to become familiar with the platform in use in their classrooms and with the workings of the mouse, keyboard controls and their functions.

Within the two schools that I have worked, the children have had free access to the computer as part of the daily provision on offer; this has allowed adults insights into a child's IT capabilities and appropriate support can then be offered. I have found these principles useful as a guide for my practice when using IT in the classroom:

- **a computer should be a resource** that is permanently available to the children for the duration of each session;
- children should have the opportunity and freedom to choose to engage with the computer at will as they would with other provision;
- children should be able to discover the possibilities available to them for themselves and by observing others purposefully using a computer, both peers and adults;
- to allow for the development of confidence and independence, children should have the **opportunity, time and space** to practise existing skills and knowledge and to develop these further through **exploration and play;**
- **computers should be seen as a tool** that can be used to support a range of curriculum activities rather then being seen in isolation as a source for entertainment;
- the use of the computer needs to be the child's choice when it is appropriate for them;
- **it is important for the children to gain experience using a range of functions** - drawing, painting, word processing, CD ROM, control using PiP or Roamer, scanning etc. if the child is to make an **informed choice** of which application meets their needs for what they have in mind e.g. selecting word processing to make a book, to annotate a drawing or create a list of labels, selecting the paint package for the creation of artwork, the use of scanner to take hand created drawings into a word processing package;

- it is important to use the **correct terminology** with children to encourage the development of, and, familiarity with the basic vocabulary and terminology associated with the use of computers and their functions e.g.

  - application, eject, floppy disc, font, hard disc, icon,

  - keyboard, load, menu, monitor, mouse, pointer,

  - print, printer, quit, restart, save, shut down, window, etc

Familiarisation

For children to become familiar with keyboard and with the workings of the mouse, content software is useful. I have found it helpful to think of content software as a 'text book'. With this type of software, children work within a given framework to develop or reinforce particular skills for the range of curriculum areas, whilst attaining practice with the mouse and keyboard.

I have observed that children who have been through the process of familiarisation have been able, either spontaneously or resulting from a request, to talk through the workings of the program with a younger or less familiar child. There are obvious benefits for both children, not least the raising of self confidence and esteem for the child in the supporting role. It also realises valuable insights into children's social skills, especially those of cooperation and negotiation.

Creativity

Once children have become used to the controls, they then are more likely, and will find it easier, to use the computer as a creative tool. Tools software, 'the exercise book', allows children to develop Information Technology Capability. Such software enables children to take control of the computer as a tool by using generic, or general, software such as a word processor and painting program.

With experience and usage of the 'tools', understanding will be developed of the best ways of using the tools to develop individual creativity. Children need to gain experience using a range of functions (applications, printers, CD-ROMs, scanners etc.) to enable them to make informed choices of applications to satisfy their chosen need or task.

Using CD ROM's with young children

Why use CD ROM's with young children? It could be argued that children who have opportunity to access IT have enough to develop in terms of their whole IT capability. I would like to suggest that when using CD ROM's, and other such interactive software, young children are being given the opportunity to start to develop and experience the techniques of research and research skills. Interactive software also has the advantage of supporting a range of curriculum areas and, as such, can be a diverse and rich classroom resource.

One child in the class has become very competent using IT. His standing has increased and he is seen as an expert, not only by the children but the adults as well. He has been reluctant to use conventional tools, pens, paint, brushes etc., to represent his experiences and uses the computer as his tool for expression and learning. He used a CD ROM to extend his scientific enquiry on the subject of magnetism. He used the software as a reference book and these are the comments written about his achievement.

Joshua has always been interested in the computer and is able to use it independently. After he had experimented with magnets during a Science week he was exploring the CD ROM 'The Way Things Work'. He called me to the computer and asked for some help in finding out about magnets. We together looked at a window in the software that had several icons on offer, Workshop, Machines, Principles of Science, History and Inventors. Joshua explored A-Z of machines but found nothing to do with magnets, he then opened Principles of Science and found a section on magnets and magnetism.

Over the next few days he returned to this section and became competent in extending his inquiries. He also discovered how to print out the information on the screen. He printed out pages from the screen, experimenting with black ink on yellow paper and colour ink on white paper. I asked some questions about how he had done it. This is what he told me:

"You click on class, then on OK then the Elephant and then it comes on ... you wait for the hand to come, you click on the hand and then it opens up."

I then asked Joshua

"How do you get from the start of 'The Way Things Work' to the magnets?"

Joshua said

"You click on that one and that one, then click on magnets then you print it out. To get a story you click on the square. To print out you click on the top, find the word 'file' and then print. Click on OK and then it prints"

Having printed the information out, Joshua then put the information into sequential order to tell the story of what he had done. He glued the printouts onto a piece of card whilst we discussed what he had done. Joshua was engaged in this process for nearly a week, discovering new things and extending his experiences. He also enjoyed recording his work."

Some examples of children using IT

1. This child (3.11 years, second term), having collected her name card from the graphic area, negotiated her way round the keyboard to type her name. She then demonstrated various skills, use of return and tabulation keys, and the selection of menu command to increase the size of the chosen font. An adult guided her through the steps to print out her text.

see figure 1

2. Having produced letter strings, this child (3.10 years) then began to select individual keys on the keyboard, demonstrating increasing knowledge and control of the keyboard.

see figure 2

3. Combining graphics and text. This child (4.2 years) cut her graphics and pasted it onto a page of text. She then chose to print it out in colour and then in black and white. This was all achieved without adult intervention.

see figure 3

4. Both of these drawings (children of 4.8 and 3.7 years) executed within a painting application match up with the child's representation in other media - i.e. graphics and paint. The child who wrote her name using the mouse shows good manipulation and control - it is difficult to do - have a try!

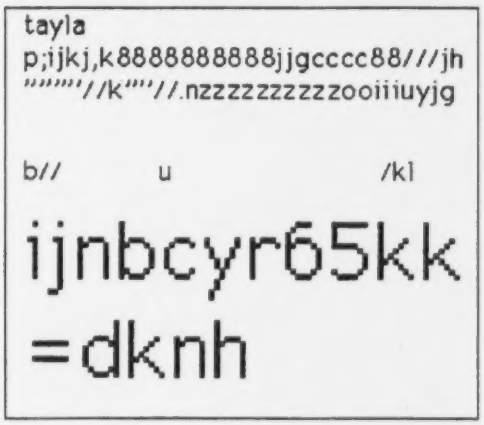


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

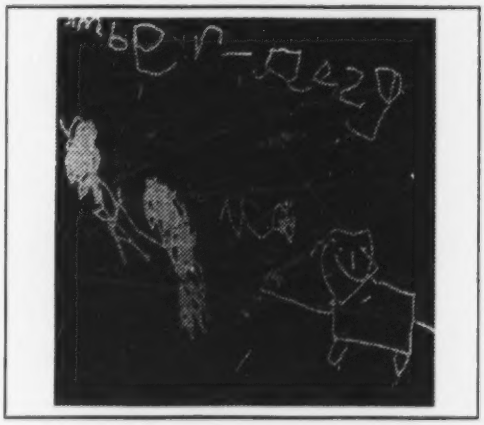


Figure 5

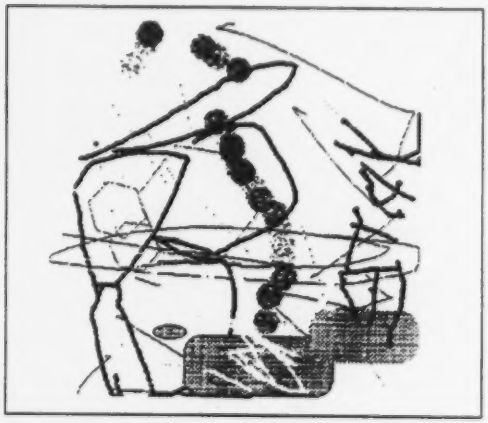


Figure 6

see figure 4 & 5

5. A shared story writing exercise showed the children the purpose of using word processing and they became more familiar with the keyboard as a result. The children produced their artwork to illustrate the story for display. The use of a hand scanner to import the pictures into the text would extend this activity and demonstrate a function of IT.

see figure 6

Some conclusions of learning potential

The use of Information Technology in the early years can become a valuable tool which is capable of enhancing:

- an awareness of the use of computers and Information Technology in everyday life;
- development of confidence with the technology;
- beginning of research skills;
- ability for sustaining and increasing concentration for individuals and groups parental interest;
- older children's confidence and esteem through the passing on of their skills and knowledge to younger children and thus increasing self esteem;
- development of positive relationships by working and learning alongside, and together, for both adults and children;
- representational drawings using the mouse;
- emerging literacy skills, e.g. locating letters on the 'qwerty' keyboard, writing for a purpose in situations where writing is relevant and useful, recognition of letters and words;
- vocabulary, relating to IT and other curriculum areas;
- problem solving skills and risk taking, 'what will happen if ... '
- ability to recall sequences of actions, 'how did I do that?'

Gina Kent is a class teacher at Chelwood Nursery School in the London Borough of Lewisham

65

Gender differentiation in the use of construction equipment in the early years of schooling

Judith Stevens

This article is taken from a M.Sc dissertation.

The study investigated the way in which girls and boys used construction equipment in two nursery classrooms - one in a nursery school, the other attached to a primary school. The methodology included the use of parental and staff questionnaires and child observation.

Early in the study, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire which aimed to gather information about the range of play materials available in children's homes. The responses from both schools showed, as was expected, a great difference in the availability of toys according to gender. Several interesting points came to light- including the huge advantage of having an older sibling of the opposite sex. Toys were generally available for younger children to play with - for example younger sisters had access to older brothers' construction equipment and cars. Access to a very limited range of toys within the home was seen to be a huge disadvantage. In all cases, without exception, the message was clear - access to a limited range of toys meant access to toys which were strongly gender-biased.

There was a great similarity between the schools in terms of parental response and this suggested that the two groups of children were entering school with similarly diverse experiences and expectations.

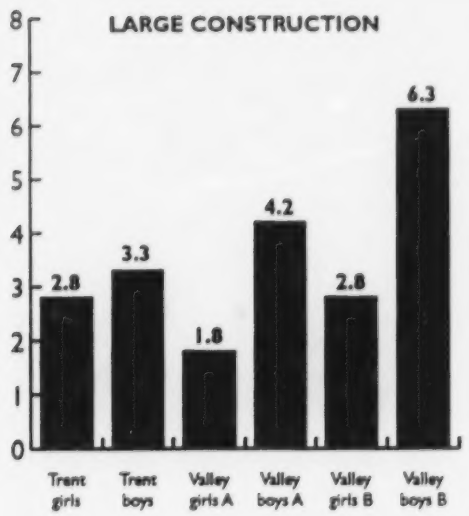


Figure 1: Total number of instances of child involvement with large construction

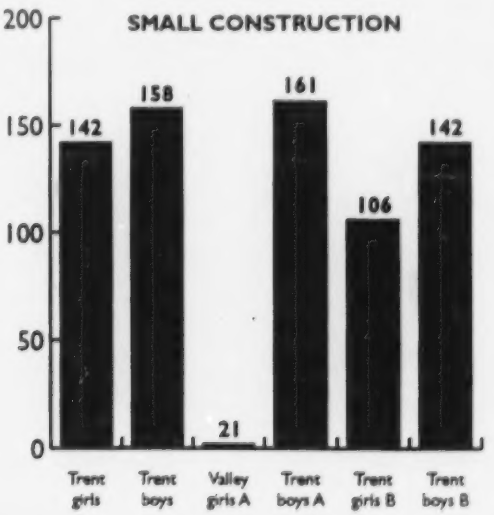


Figure 2: Total number of instances of involvement with large construction child involvement with small construction

Valley A is at the start of the study, Valley B is at the end of the study

In the same way, the classes appeared to be offering similar experiences within the class environment. The staff questionnaire showed a very high level of awareness of gender issues in both schools.

In such circumstances then, one would have expected similar results when timed observations were made of the number of children involved in various activities. However, as can be seen in the figures, there were huge differences between the two schools. It became apparent that at 'Trent' (the nursery school) the number of instances of child involvement with construction was comparable for girls and boys. At 'Valley' however, the gulf was immense. Work by Ross and Browne (Girls as Constructors in the Early Years 1993) showed a situation similar to that at Valley when observing in three nurseries.

So then what was causing the differences in the number, and the type of instances of construction play in the two schools?

Observations of children involved in construction activities showed that the way in which some boys used the equipment was different from the way most girls used the equipment. The observations tended to show:

- girls' play was more imaginative, more co-operative, more peer-orientated and more linked with 'real-life' home experiences.

- boys' play was seen as more competitive (taller; bigger; faster), more equipment-orientated and any imaginative play often appeared linked to 'fantasy' characters.

(i) "Up, up and away!"

An all boy group with four members, building Lego 'rockets'

Matthew: I've got all the blue ones - a blue spaceship ...with a yellow light... brummm... ('flies' it around the table)

Kieran: it's no good... it'll explode...it's too small (gathers blocks randomly) to go right up it's got to be long... long and sharp... like this...with two lights!

Rory: what's you making? a rocket, it is isn't it?... I can make a rocket, a rocket with windows

[Memhet pulls several windows towards himself and begins to builds a tower.]

Kieran: not as big as this...no...no...they're my Lego..let go Memhet, that's mine... I said, it's all mine!

Matthew: not the blue ones...I'm making a rocket spaceship...a space rocket ship

Kieran: a rocket's bigger...like mine...mine's the biggest

Rory: no, look, stand it up... see, this is bigger, so it's fastest... up and up... (the 'rocket' falls and splits)

Kieran: (laughing) explosion...explosion...eject! This sort of episode was typical of many recorded of similar groups of boys. These were boys who often used the construction area and rarely engaged in cross-gender play.

Throughout these play episodes, the boys were continually comparing size and speed. The emphasis was on 'taller', 'bigger' and 'faster'. On some occasions pairs within the group teamed up to make a 'taller' rocket, but often the efforts were individual.

(ii) "It is bigger - isn't it?"

Sarah is building a tower of Duplo blocks, carefully selecting 'doubles' in blue and red. David approaches, he piles up six blocks.

David: I'm building a tower, a big tower... it's huge

[Sarah's tower is now 13 bricks high, David's is 10]

David: look Sarah, look at this... it's ginormous... yours is titchy...see, mine's bigger already... it's getting bigger... it's going to the roof

[Sarah looks, but says nothing, her tower is now 23 bricks high, David is having trouble at 17]

David: there, the biggest ever tower... higher and higher... bring yours here, come on... here...

[Sarah makes no attempt to move her tower and begins to select Duplo people]

David: (moving his tower towards Sarah's) I said mine's bigger... now you see, yours is really tiny... tinier than my sister

David sees he's getting no response and dashes towards the outside door. Sarah looks at both towers and turns to the female observer]

Sarah: see this, my one, it is bigger, isn't it?

The observer believed, as the staff later confirmed, that neither child had difficulty understanding the terms 'taller than; bigger than; tiny; tinier'. Both children knew that Sarah's tower was the tallest. but David was driven to compare the towers, even from the onset. His had to be bigger...taller. Sarah, conversely, had no need to compare, she was happily and competently constructing her tower (later defined as a 'crane'). However, as soon as David left the scene, she was keen to point out to the observer that she knew her tower was the tallest.

(iii) "It's raining... the pigs need a house"

Five girls are involved in play with Duplo blocks. There are no 'people' or 'animals' but the Duplo is arranged on a piece of fake 'grass'.

Hannah: this is a little wall... it's to stop the boy running on to the road

Lydia: where's the boy?

Hannah: here, silly (cups hand around a hidden object)

Lydia: I hold the buggy by the road... Thomas wants to run but mummy says "get in"

Sarah: where'd you get the boy?...I want a boy

Tina: there's no boy...have you got some cows? the boy might be with the cows

[Hannah pulls out a tray of farm animals from a nearby toy store]

Hannah: how many cows?... there's hundreds here...you want a black one?

[Hannah gives Tina a handful of cows]

Hannah: there's no boy... (hunts in tray) ... there's a lady with some chickens...

Lydia: put the chicken behind the wall... chickens mustn't get in the road... they'll get flat... like the rabbit...

Tina: have you got a rabbit?

Lydia: what rabbit?... Sam's not a rabbit... Sam's a dog... (laughs)

Hannah: woof...woof...

[everyone laughs]

Sarah: I'm building a house... a small house for pigs...

Lydia: yes... quick, a house... it's raining... the pigs need a house...

In this episode, the girls appear to be developing each other's ideas. Hannah's initial idea of a wall to keep a boy 'safe' prompts the others to want people or animals . Hannah demonstrates both autonomy and confidence in providing the necessary equipment. Again, the group's needs and ideas prompt the search for appropriate 'props'. Their imagination is the focus, not the equipment.

(iv) "The wheels on the bus"

It's a sunny day and the majority of the class are outside. Sunita has made her way, quite deliberately, to the Lego table. She selects a red base plate and carefully covers it with white double bricks. All of the time she is singing to herself. The tune is similar to a class favourite, 'the wheel's on the bus'.

Sunita: (singing) mummy and... mummy and... Babcha... no baby...no baby...why (indecipherable)... mummy...love... love... daddy too...

[Sunita continues singing isolated words and phrases. She builds a border of assorted bricks on the base plate, using a variety of sizes and colours. several windows and a doors are added.

At this stage the observer predicts Sunita is building 'home' - family names are clearly heard].

Sunita: dinner... dinner... baby's hungry, where's the dinner... cry baby cry...

[Sunita scrambles in the Lego tray, finding two sets of wheels. The fixing of these on to the base is no easy task for her, but she perseveres. Several of the top bricks become dislodged. However, the whole time Sunita sings and hums.]

The construction is finally 'complete'. Sunita begins to sing, loudly :

Sunita: the wheels on the bus go round and round!...

Sunita was rarely seen at the construction area. However, on this occasion, with no pressures, she spent over fifteen minutes planning and constructing a fairly complex 'bus'. The singing appears to indicate her intention, from the onset, was to build a vehicle to hold her 'family' (finger puppets, added later) and take them for a trip. Given the time, and the space, Sunita showed herself to be quite able in the area of construction.

To return then, to the differences observed in the two classes. The following two early observations at Valley give a clear indication of the nursery atmosphere.

(v) "No girls here!"

Malachi and Scott have been playing with a small amount of Lego on a single table. Several other boys have attempted to participate, but they have been excluded.

Malachi: did you finish with the wheels yet?

Scott: na, this is a transporter... transporters gotta have them wheels...innit?

Malachi: not always...some transporters don't... I seed one with no wheels... tracks, not wheels... tracks and a magnet... huge magnets for to do... no, to hold the cars... all 'em cars

Scott: tracks... is there tracks?... O.K. two, two wheels for a motor-bike

Malachi: a skateboard... did you see it?... the pink one... Darren lost it

[Rosie arrives, and picks up some loose bricks from the floor]

Scott: put it back!

Malachi: now!... leave it... not yours...go (indecipherable)... go on

Scott: no girls... no girls here!

[Rosie puts the blocks on the table and carries on past]

It would appear that Rosie never had any intention of actually playing with the Lego. She walked past the table, picked up the blocks from the floor and went to place them on the table. The boys verbal reaction and body language was very aggressive. It is unclear what Malachi said, but it was said with venom. Since they were clearly not threatened, this reaction seemed excessive. no adult responded to the confrontation, although it was unclear whether the incident was observed or heard by a member of staff.

However, interesting questions arise: why did Rosie fell compelled to 'tidy up' a toy she did not play with?; why didn't she attempt to play?; why didn't she retaliate?: why did the boys behave so territorially? There are no easy answers here, but the incident gives a clear indication of the pervading nursery atmosphere.

(vi) "Where does this belong?"

Most of the class are outside playing. Carla wanders towards the graphics area, which has a small amount of Duplo blocks on it. Carla picks up a red block and runs her finger along the transfer of a flower on the side. She picks up another red block, looking at the surface. She continues to pick up the red blocks, scans them and places them in a pile. She makes no attempt to stack them. When all the red blocks have been investigated, she checks under the table, then moves away. The incident last nearly two minutes.

It is unclear what Carla hoped to achieve in her search of red blocks. Was this the first time she had noticed the flowers? Did she assume all the red blocks were decorated? Whatever her initial intention, even a quiet, undisturbed atmosphere did not encourage Carla to experiment with actually constructing.

The new class teacher at Valley was aware of the situation within the class, and devised strategies to involve girls more in construction activities. A significant financial outlay was invested in the purchase of construction equipment. Staff had opportunities to become confident with the materials before introducing them to the children. The teacher was aware that many girls were attracted to the adults in the class and therefore planned, with the nursery team, that adults would work in the construction area, specifically to support the girls and to stop 'boy domination'. No attempt was made to secure a 'girls only' time. The teacher decided to enhance the Duplo, which was the construction that more girls appeared drawn to. Two attractive sets were chosen - the Duplo farm and the Duplo zoo. Ross and Browne (ob cit) have suggested 'removing the girl bits' - adopting a strategy of taking away windows, doors floors and play people from construction toys in order to encourage girls to explore the potential of the medium. Staff at Valley, however, decided to 'build on' the girls' interest in imaginative play. In a similar way, graphical media were added to the construction area.

(vii) "Is this your farm?"

The new Duplo farm had been set up in an attractive manner. One nursery nurse sat at the large table as the children arrived.

Adult: hello Sita, how are you?

Sita: alright...wos that?

Adult: it's new...do you like it?

Sita: (picking up the animals) horse... cow... two cows

Adult: that's right, two cows...can you see any more?

Elena: a farm... whose farm?... is it your farm?

Sita: cows... I've got cows... mine

Adult: it's our farm, it belongs to everyone in the school

[Bronwyn, Catherine, Patrick and Malachi arrive]

Malachi: I've got a tractor, it's mine... where's the cart?

Patrick: (tries to turn the handle on the farmhouse)what does this do?... Jackie, what's it for?

Adult: what do you think?... can you turn it?

Bronwyn: let me see... like this... look, round and round... oh...

Patrick: it's broke... you broke it

Bronwyn: no... no I didn't

Adult: t's not broken, it's supposed to move... look what's happening

Catherine: (claps) moving...it's moving

Adult: that's right... the vegetables are moving into the truck... would you like to try Catherine?

The group stay together for about twenty minutes - working together co-operatively to build the house. Jackie, the adult, does not allow the boys to become dominant. She encourages the girls to answer questions and give instructions.

The adult input into the new Duplo activities lasted for two weeks. Throughout this time many of the girls became quite competent at constructing the farm house in a variety of ways. The imaginative 'prop' style of the equipment appeared to appeal to many of the girls' play styles. The sets were not allowed to become 'boy only' toys.

One observation, however, showed that deeply rooted beliefs are not easily dispelled. The presence of an adult in the construction area is not sufficient. Practice most reflect policy and must be apparent in both the intended and the received curriculum.

(viii) "My mummy's making pancakes tonight!"

A staff member at Valley became involved in construction play. It was her specific aim to involve girls in the activity and to support them in their use of construction equipment. While building, the conversation tuned to the proposed events of the evening.

Hannah: my mummy's making pancakes tonight!

Adult: that's lovely... I like pancakes... is your mummy going to make pancakes Sita?

Sita: I don't know

Adult: I expect she will.. Hannah's mummy will make pancakes at her home... your mummy will make pancakes at your home... I'll make pancakes for my girls at my house... Jackie will make pancakes at her house and Helen (teacher) will make pancakes at her house... because Helen and Jackie and I are mummies, you know...

The adult here was presenting the children with clear stereotypes. Whatever the role of the female adults in the nursery class was, they were, above all, 'mummies' and 'mummies make pancakes'. No concessions were made for home circumstances, whether gender or culture related. Sita's mother, a devout Hindu, would still prepare pancakes, after all, that's what 'mummies' do.

The difference then, between the intended curriculum - learning activities within a supportive environment which promoted equal opportunities and the received curriculum was vast. The message received here being that females may become involved in construction tasks, but their interests remain firmly rooted in domestic issues such as home-making.

So then, as early years educators, we must be aware at all times of the strong influence we have on children's behaviour through our words and actions. As Browne and France have said (Untying the Apron Strings, 1986, P.147)

> "... sexism and stereotyping in the nursery are generally not deliberate - most staff are sincere in their wish to give equal support to girls and boys in their care. But even the most caring and sensitive of adults can, at times, reinforce traditional stereotypes of what women and men, girls and boys are like and can do."

To end on a positive note, this observation was made after the 'adult input' at Valley. Maya had rarely been seen near the construction area before. It suggested that some girls had gained in confidence.

(ix) 'Tigers on the Duplo tower'

Maya was playing alone with the Duplo zoo. She chatted to herself throughout.

Maya: all the elephants into this field please... come on, hurry up... elephants need lots of space... build a big wall, a big wall so the baby elephant doesn't get eaten by the lions... and tigers... tigers are always hungry... tigers are always on the lookout for fat babies...a lookout tower...up and up...

[Maya builds a tower, twelve blocks high]

Maya: on the tower... tiger, mummy tiger, take your baby... tigers on the tower can see everywhere... see the elephants... and the keeper...keeper, where's my lunch?

So then, although some of the practice within the classroom may have been questionable, the planned adult intervention had been successful overall. As can be seen from figures 1 and 2 earlier in the article, great changes had occurred. The most notable significant change was the huge increase in the number of recorded instances of girls' involvement with small construction equipment. The adult support, which had been focussed in this area had clearly made a difference.

Judith Stevens

The Fox and the Gingerbread Man

73

Using information texts with the under 5's

Nikki Mellor

I teach in a new under five's centre that opened with a few children and even fewer staff. The head of the centre and senior worker bought a stock of basic fiction books and a few reference and information books from a nearby wholesaler. The plan was that we would buy more as staff needed them and could share experiences about which books worked. For the first year as new children and staff arrived we concentrated on consolidating our fiction stock with a broad selection of stories and poems. We began to organise multiple copies of core books for which the staff made story props and audio tapes. Making a list was easy as there were so many wonderful books available and the only factor that limited our choice was financial. When it came to drawing up a list of information books the situation was more problematic. We all felt far more confident about recommending good story books than we did about information books. We felt less confident about saying what makes a good information book and we could list only a few that we had found useful. Let me explain what I mean by describing the problems we had recently.

When I decided to write this article we were in the throws of a frantic interest in the life-cycle of butterflies shown by many 3-4 year olds in our nursery room. In the previous summer months we had found numerous mini-beasts outside. I had encouraged the children to look carefully at these. We had mini-microscopes to help with close study and magnifiers to take to those small animals too small to be carefully brushed into our pots. We used the "William Curtis Easy -To- Find Field Guides" to identify our finds and these generated many discussions. Each page illustrates the life-cycle of a minibeast, what it eats, what eats it and it's habitat, all absolutely fascinating. Once children understand the logic of how the page is organised they can apply that logic to each page. "This must be the eggs.....so that's the next bit ....it grows out.....then this next.....now it changes....bigger.....now there's eggs again." Sadly these books are now out of print. We also used adult reference books on various kinds of minibeasts and plants.

This interest continued into autumn so we made "The Very Hungry Caterpillar"our core book for the half-term. We decided we would have three central aims for the natural science area of this project. We wanted the children to continue developing their knowledge about the life cycle of the butterflies and other mini beasts they might see around them. We wanted them to begin to learn how to use books to find out the answers to their questions and realise that the skills needed to read and write information books are different to those needed for fiction. And most important of all we wanted the knowledge the children gained from this project to be embedded in a developing concept, that plants and animals are reliant upon other plants and animals for their well being. To break one part of the chain would mean repercussions within other parts of the animal and plant world.

We had very few books on minibeasts so I asked our education library to send us a selection of books. They arrived and the children opened the box with anticipation. They all looked interesting with their bright coloured title pages. We flipped through them and the lay-outs were eye-catching, the illustrations beautiful. We couldn't wait to use them. At first we were all happy to look at the pictures and discuss them. The problems started when we wanted to access information. Several of the books were successfully read to a group, as if they were a story book, but were useless for accessing information quickly. Some had no contents, others no index. Many didn't present information in a way that answered the children's questions. It was frustrating that these books purporting to be information books were not organised for the speedy retrieval of information.

Many books did not have the information that we expected to find. For example on one occasion a child wanted to find out what a baby butterfly looked like and brought "Keeping Minibeasts-Butterflies and Moths."This book, with photographs on every page, does not have one photo of a caterpillar, of the eggs or of eggs being laid. The series has a separate book on keeping caterpillars as if they have no connection with butterflies or moths. We found we were ending up using the same few books so eventually I collected together the books that were useful and abandoned the rest.

One book that was excellent was "Butterfly and Caterpillar "from the "Stopwatch"series published by A.&C.Black. This has wonderful photographs that show, clearly, all the stages of the life cycle. Some children wanted to have the whole book read to them but most used the photos to trace the progress of the butterfly's life. The children were fascinated by the change that took place in the cocoon. Many spent time repeatedly wrapping their models of caterpillars in cocoons, (painted toilet rolls wrapped in strong paper) and then painting emerging butterflies. They returned to this book to talk through what was going to happen next again and again.

In addition to books we had 2 videos of the butterfly life cycle. One was Dorling Kindersley's "All about Minibeasts", the other we recorded from a recent "Words and Pictures"programme. When we watched these we found they had a very different approach to the subject. In the first video the narrator told a jolly story that was long and over wordy. The children found it hard to understand and quickly lost interest. It was a totally incorrect genre for a science video. It missed the important connections that young children find so hard to understand for example, although the voice over was explaining that the butterfly lay the eggs the film didn't show the eggs being laid. The BBC programme, on the other hand, was much better. The people who made it were obviously concerned with extending the children's knowledge and not just filling a gap in the market. Many of our younger children had great difficulty in understanding where caterpillars came from. Discussions revealed that their experience of what came out of eggs seemed to be limited to chicken's eggs and dinosaur eggs. They had as yet little concept of the relationship of the mother to her eggs. For several the confusion remained despite our use of stories and factual books like Dorling Kindersley's "Eggs". For them it was this BBC text that made the difference. They saw the butterfly laying the eggs and the caterpillars coming out of them and the light began to dawn. We watched it several times and they talked through what they thought was happening. At last they began to understand the entirety of the cycle.

As the project was coming to an end I decided to encourage a group to annotate a wall display made with their models. It had developed into an ongoing picture that was constantly being added to by individual children as they played around with the ideas generated by the concept of a life cycle. The group who chose to annotate it discussed and argued and eventually decided these were the statements they thought explained the life cycle of a butterfly:

The caterpillar came out of the eggs.
They have to eat.
They got fatter.
They make a cocoon around themselves.
They stay for 2 weeks inside the cocoon.
The caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly.
The butterfly eats with its curly tongue
to get big.
The eggs come out of the caterpillar's bottom.

We placed them in a circle, on the display, alongside the stages they described. We then used the statements to make a zig zag book that illustrates the life cycle. "It just goes on and on and on and.....so don't kill caterpillars or you won't have no butterflies,"as one child so graphically told his older brothers.

Our experience of this particular project has only confirmed what we already knew. Building up a stock of good information books takes time. Yet it is essential to have a varied selection not least because early years practitioners cannot know everything. We have to depend on the expertise of others. How frustrating it is then that this area of children's publishing seems to have been dominated by design and marketing. In our experience it is better to take your time and look for those books where consideration has been given to the reader and their purpose in using the book. Fiction can be used creatively as a starting point for the development of ideas as it was in this project. It can be used to stimulate discussion about the nature of fact and fiction. But we are greatly in need of non fiction books that make a difference to what children know. Books that are produced by people who know how children learn, who understand the difference between an information book and a story and who know about children well enough to know the kind of questions they ask. A good information book enables children to learn about a topic in a way that encourages them to generalise. It gives information in a form that is embedded in the principles of that particular body of knowledge. Adult reference books on insects, Spiders, Trees etc, can be very useful. They assume some knowledge of the subject and often have to be 'translated' by the adult but the more they are used the easier it gets for both adult and child.

a beetle

Finally no educational establishment can afford to waste their ever decreasing budget on books that look great in catalogues but turn out to be next to useless in practice. I would consequently like to propose that we use this publication to acquaint each other with those information texts that do the job we want them to do. Which maths books do you insist no classroom should be without and how do you use them? How about the history of toys or houses or boats, is there a book, video, CD ROM or computer game that you would recommend? What texts have been used successfully with children who want to know "what's it like in Brazil where Pedro is?"I am convinced that between us we could draw up a core of information books that no early years setting should be without. To start the ball rolling here are the books we have bought for our minibeast collection.

- The nature trail book of insect watching (Usbourne, ISBN 0 86020 0477)
- Ants by T.Terry & M.Linton, illustrated by Jackie Holland (Picture Puffins, ISBN 0 14 050885 6)
- Also Frogs in the same series - simple clean illustrations, content, index and glossary - very useful text that emphasises important nouns.
- Stopwatch books - a brilliant series including Bumble bee, Snail, Ladybird, Honeybee, Dragonfly, Moth, Fly, Tadpole and the frog, Caterpillar and the butterfly (A&C Black)
- Observer book of butterflies by Paul Morrison
- The Oxford book of insects (ISBN 0 19 217725 7)

Nikki Mellor is a teacher at Fortune Park Under Fives Centre in the London Borough of Islington

Marian Whitehead - An Appreciation of our First Chairperson

We were all sad to accept Marian Whitehead's resignation from the chair of the association at the AGM last autumn. It seems extraordinary that it is now more than six years since a group of us at Goldsmiths' established the Goldsmiths' Association for Early Childhood, now affectionately known as GAEC. Marian was one of the founder members and has served as our first chairperson for more than six years. During that time she has set a very high standard for both the activities of the association and for the way in which its business is conducted.

GAEC was formed at a time of great uncertainty and disruption in early education, as new government policies, combined with an economic recession, began to impact on the education service, particularly in the London area. There was, for example, the break-up of the Inner London Education Authority which, through its advisory service, had provided research and development work of a substantial kind, championing in particular the cause of high quality nursery-infant education in the capital. There was also the introduction of the subject-based National Curriculum, first in teacher training and then into the schools themselves. This subject/test-led curriculum inevitably weakened, and subsequently destroyed the early years specialism in the colleges, and it thus served to fracture early years practice by separating Key Stage One from reception and under-fives provision.

Their increasing anxiety about what might happen to quality provision for under-8s led many teachers who worked in the vicinity of Goldsmiths' to contact Marian and other tutors at the college to ask if a forum could be established to promote the study of, and the exchange of ideas about, good professional practice in the early years.

GAEC was formed in 1990 and launched at the October day conference that year. Since then, Marian has chaired seven annual conferences, most of the twelve GAEC seminars and the association's Steering Committee meetings. In addition, she has contributed regularly to the Newsletters and, more recently, to Papers from GAEC, and she has presented a paper at one of the GAEC seminars. She has also worked tirelessly to ensure that these events have been well organized and of a high quality. In short, she has played a leading role in the many practical contributions she has made to GAEC as well as by providing the association with a well respected and inspirational leadership through the first years of its existence. We are very grateful to Marian for all the work she has done on behalf of GAEC, and those of us who had the opportunity of working with her most closely are already reflecting on the many ways in which we miss her.

Firstly we miss Marian's steely determination to act on behalf of GAEC as an advocate for young children and to challenge any suggestions or policies which attempt to undermine high quality provision in the early years. Her eloquent responses - often having to be produced at short notice and at the most inconvenient times of the year - made on our behalf to the many consultative documents bear witness to the quality of her advocacy and her passionate conviction that our most vulnerable young citizens deserve the very best of care and education.

Secondly, we miss her professional understanding and scholarship which she employed to great effect on behalf of GAEC. This was perhaps best revealed in her elegant introductions of guest speakers at conferences and seminars. For not only did she always make distinguished guests most welcome, she also made it obvious to them, in doing so, that she had both read their work and recognized its significance for the early years.

Thirdly, we miss the respect she inspired on our behalf from colleagues, students and policy-makers (even those who disagreed with her). This made her a powerful spokesperson at the many meetings where GAEC representation has been requested.

Lastly, we miss the warmth, wit and generosity of her companionship, and, perhaps above all, her ability to laugh at the world and herself even in times of great difficulty for early childhood education.

Marian has not of course ceased to work in support of early education. Her talents continue to be employed in her role as early years consultant. We are delighted also that, although she now lives in Norwich, she has maintained her membership of GAEC, so that we can look forward to seeing her again from time to time.

We thank her sincerely for all her work for GAEC, and indeed for early childhood education generally, and assure her that we will be seeking to maintain the very high standards she has set. We wish her well in her new professional role.

Geva Blenkin (Hon. Sec.)

Literacy and Bilingualism in the Early Years: European Perspectives:

Joint conference IEDPE(UK) and NAPE (SE London)

Clare Kelly

On October 11th a joint conference was held at the Centre for Language in Primary Education by the Institut Europeen pour le Developpement des Potentialities de tous les Enfants (IEDPE) to which GAEC is affliliated and the National Association for Primary Education (NAPE).

Eighty delegates, representing a range of early years professionals from all over the country, gathered to listen to speakers from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Greece and the UK and to discuss issues and compare experiences around literacy and bilingualsim in the Early Years. Speakers from the European mainland reported on their research with young children and highlighted particular issues of concern which were picked up later in the day.

There were three workshops offered: Maria Nabuco from Portugal gave participants an opportunity to discuss her study which examined the effect of three different early childhood curricula on groups of five year olds in different settings. Pamela Oberhuemer from Germany described some of the in-service work she was involved in with kindergarted educators concerning the delicate area of reflecting on cultural assumptions and practices and discussed the series of materials she had developed around stories and other aspects of children's culture as a starting point for intercultural dialogue. Gella Varnova-Skoura from Greece, Marina Formisano from Italy, Carmen Colmenares from Spain and Henrietta Dombey from the UK each talked about the project on early literacy they were in involved with in their own countries and the common strands that were emerging.

The final session entitled 'round table discussion' and a common element of European conferences, involved workshop leaders raising issues from their workshops and discussion from the floor. Issues that emerged were: escaping the restrictions of a narrow curriculum, children on the margin, what counts as research, children's culture - home, school and in between. making the familiar strange: demonstrating the value of international contact and visits.

Course members found the day too short but felt they had benefitted from the formal sessions and the informal contact with friends and colleagues.

Training Teachers for Kindergarten

Pr. Dr. Siham Badr & Dr. Mohammed Khalfan Al-Rawway

Pr. Dr. Siham Badr attended the GAEC Conference in October 1996. She gave us a summary of her paper on the training of early years teachers in the United Arab Emirates. It was agreed that her paper would be published in Papers From GAEC.

Introduction

Most of the Arab countries have recently shown interest in establishing and developing institutions for Kindergarten (KG) teachers. Some of these institutions are in the form of autonomous colleges, such as those in Egypt; others are in departments attached to Faculties of Education, such as the one in the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), which grants a Bachelor's Degree in Education, with a specialization in Kindergarten studies.

This report focuses on the new "Professional Teaching Diploma"year included in the new plans and curricula for KG programmes (offered only to female students) to the UAE University of Faculty of Education. The new KG programme has been extended to provide 10 semesters of preparation which include, during the last two semesters, an intensive field experience in addition to more rigorous academic courses.

The report also includes a comparison between the old 1990 four-year programme (see table 1) still in use until June 1998), and the new five-year programme, and presents the main problems and difficulties which the new plan has been designed to overcome. The first batch of graduates from this new programme will complete their requirements in June 1999.

Table 1

The Professional Teaching Diploma

The **"Professional Teaching Diploma"**is offered during the 9th and 10th semesters (fifth year of studies). It concentrates on the **professional preparation** of the students, and focuses on consolidating their teaching strategies and methodology on the one hand, and exposing them through field experience to the practical aspects of their profession on the other hand.

We would like to remind the audience that the newly developed programme allocates 10 credits to practical training, which represents one third of the total number of credits required for the fifth year (30 credit hours). These 10 credits are distributed over the last two semesters as follows: 4 credits in the 9th semester covering six weeks of continuous classroom practice at the end of the semester, and 6 credits covering 8 weeks at the beginning of the 10th semester.

In the previous programme, only six credit hours were required, and they were not credited towards the 132 credit requirement for graduation. Moreover, as these courses received a Pass/Fail grade which did not affect the student's Grade Point Average (GPA), students were not motivated and neglected this essential part of their education. In the new programme the 10 credit hours allocated to professional training are counted in the 162 credit requirement for graduation, and receive a grade which is computed in the student GPA. The students, as a result became motivated to excel in this part of their programme.

This programme offers the students a longer and continuous observation period under the supervision of the Academic Advisor (Faculty Member in the FOE), the Kindergarten director, some qualified kindergarten teachers, and an inspector, all from the UAE Ministry of Education. Thanks to this programme, students get the opportunity to live the children's every day life in the Kindergarten, for a much longer period than offered in most of the other Kindergarten programmes in other similar Departments in the FOE of other Arab countries.

Practical training and field experience in the newly developed programme

The new programme includes two courses for practical training (Practical Training I and II). These courses are to be taken over the two semesters of the fifth year (Professional Teaching Diploma).

A. Practical Training

Practical Training I is a fifth year fourth-credit course. It is offered during the second half of the first semester. It follows 8 weeks during which the student takes 6 four-credit courses in teaching methodology in the following disciplines: Arabic Language, Islamic Studies, Science, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and psycho-motor skills.

The course itself includes field experience in kindergarten for a period of six consecutive weeks (six days per week). During this period students are asked to observe how a kindergarten class is conducted and to discuss their observation with their advisors. By the end of the period, students may be requested to take an active part in the class, in preparation for the next practical training course which will be offered in the following semester.

The last two weeks of the semester are devoted to revision and preparation of exams.

Table 2 summarises the first semester activities, which incorporate teaching methodology and practical training:

Table 2

Goals of Practical Training I

This course aims at enabling the students to achieve the following within their professional environment (Kindergarten room and corners):

1. Set their objectives, choose the appropriate resources focusing on self-learning skills.

2. Analyse and evaluate the activities which they are observing.

3. Acquire positive attitudes towards the profession, through stimulating

   positive feedback.

Students Daily Plan (Practical Training II)

During the six-week training course, students work in groups of four to five along the daily plan shown in table 3.

Table 3

B. Practical Training II

Practical Training II is a fifth year six-credit course. It is offered during the first part of the second semester, and includes field experience in kindergartens for a period of eight consecutive weeks (six days per week). During this period, students proceed with kindergarten practice within the professional environment of a Kindergarten classroom, and participate actively in the teaching process.

Table 4 summarises the second semester activities, which again incorporate teaching methodology and practical training, and lead to the "Professional Teaching Diploma".

Table 4

Goal of Practical Training II:

This course aims at enabling the students to achieve the following:

1. Get acquainted with the Ministry of Education curricula for KG I and II

   (experience based curricula).

2. Learn their future professional responsibilities.

3. Gel acquainted with the administrative and technical staff in their professional environment and learn to deal with them.

4. Learn to plan and implement the various classroom activities.

5. Practice modern teaching strategies in their field of specialisation.

6. Evaluate their own work as well as their peers'.

7. Consolidate their positive outlook on the profession.

Students Daily Plan (Practical Training II):

During the eight-week training course students work along the daily plan shown in table 5.

C. General Comments

As a whole, the newly developed practical training program provides students with the opportunity for gradual progress from exposure to and observation of the KG material and curriculum to full and active participation into the teaching process. In addition, the intensive and continuous aspect of this training increases the students chances to acquire a deeper, more durable experience in their field of specialisation. Finally, the fact that this training course grade is included in the students' Grade Point Average (GPA), generates more motivation and drive students to seek excellence in their practical achievements as well as in their more academic oriented courses.

References:

1. Developed plan of Education College, UAEU

2. Guide of Field practical training in Education College - Practical Training Bureau.

3. National Research Project for Manpower Development & Education Planning.

4. Preparation of Pre-school (KG) staff in the Arab World. The Arab league of Education, Culture & Science, 1996.

Pr. Dr Siham Badr & Dr. Mohammed Khalfan Al-Rawway are both from the Faculty of Education United Arab Emirates University

QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE PRACTICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

(The problems and difficulties addressed by students)

In order to determine the students perception of both the old and new practical training programs, a field study was conducted in 1995 on a group of 180 students specialising in KG education through the old program.

The field study included a comprehensive questionnaire which allowed to underline the major problems and difficulties related to the old program, and to determine to what extent the new programme has succeeded in addressing them. The findings are summarized on the chart below.

Table 1

Drawbacks of 1990 old Practical Training Programme	Improvements provided by 1994 new Practical Training Programme
1. Insufficient hours assigned for practical training (6 credits)	Credits assigned for practical training increased (10 credits)
2. No continuity in practical training.	Continuous practical training spread on 10 credits over two semesters.
3. Practical training not included in 132-credit graduation requirements.	Practical training I and II (10 credits) included in 162-credit graduation requirements.
4. Practical Training results scored as Pass/Fail not included in student GPA.	Practical Training I & II results scored by points and part of student GPA.
5. Insufficient number of specialised academic supervisors.	No change*
6. Gap between what is taught in the college and the reality of KG environment in UAE Ministry of Education.	No change*
7. Model KG for practical training not available in the college.	No change*

* *Currently discussion between University and Ministry of Education is addressing these issues*

Table 2 FIFTH YEAR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING DIPLOMA FIRST SEMESTER

Weeks	1 to 8	9 to 14	15 & 16
Course	6 two-credit courses in teaching methodology	Professional Training: Field Observation and Practice	Revision & Exam Preparation
Credits	12 (6x2)	4 (applying theoretical knowledge in practical field)	-

Table 3

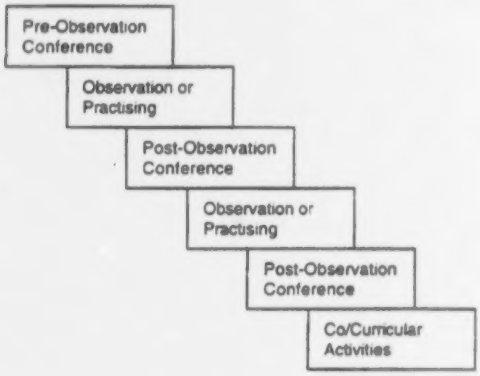
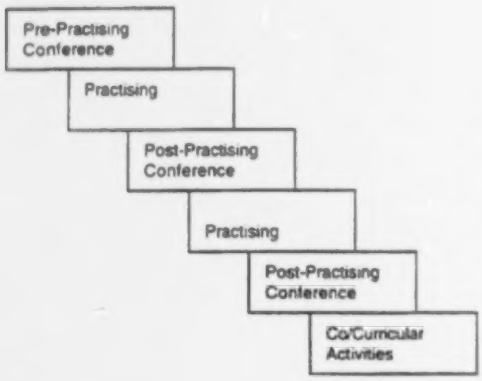


Table 4

FIFTH YEAR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING DIPLOMA SECOND SEMESTER

Weeks	1 to 8	9 to 16
Course	Professional Training: Field Observation & Participation	4 Courses Teaching Methodology
Credits	6	8 (4x2))

Table 5



85

Report on GAEC Conference:

Changing World, Changing Childhood

October 12 1997

The changing context within which we operate

Professor Philip Gammage, University of Nottingham

Philip Gammage started by identifying the influences on children and their lives. He saw the child at the centre being immediately affected by their genes, their socialisation and their care and education. Beyond that the main influences on children and their world he saw as the changing family, the changes in concepts of learning, the reification of the market, the media, and the conflicts in beliefs and ideologies. He then outlined the main changes in these areas and the impact these have on children, their lives and education.

The changing family

He firstly reminded us of the changing roles of men and woman in society. Controversially he postulated that one of the effects of this could be that men would become redundant. Some of their previous role in the work force and the family is being taken over by women, and research in biology is moving into the realms of cloning and artificial insemination. The evidence shows that patterns of work have changed and that by the year 2000 60% of the work force would be female (it is 43.5% at the moment). Many of these women have children. Patterns of family structure are changing. In England and Wales only 5% of families represent the 'traditional' family. By the year 2000 40% of children will have experienced the remarriage of one parent, and in 1994 31% of children were born to unmarried women. We have the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe and 83% of these are born to single mothers. In the United Kingdom one third of children live in families on income support and we have one of the worst rates of child poverty. These enormous changes in family structure, he argued, were changing children's experiences. As a example of this he cited Chomsky's research that shows that there is less talk going on now in families because life styles mitigate against things like 'family meal times'

Changing concepts of learning

Professor Gammage reminded us of important recent research in psychology on styles of learning, (eg Chomsky and Gardner) and on differences between men's and women's learning (eg Grey and Goldman) that has significantly extended and changed our view of learning. But he noted that this had not been taken on by government and schools. We are tied into a frozen and rather outdated concept of learning, and the current knowledge about learning has not filtered into education and so is not having the impact it should on our understanding of children's learning.

Reification of the market

The 'market' and 'market forces', he noted, have assumed increased importance. Resources not values had become society's prime concern, and money making reigned supreme as a goal. Part of this process has involved the demistification of the professions so that they have lost their previous prestige in society. He felt that in one sense this was positive as it opened up the professions but on the other hand it we not helpful if the professions became constantly bound by litigation and inspection. Taking this to an extreme, teachers, it could be argued had become merely 'operatives' relaying a tightly controlled curriculum, (he noted other countries' national curriculum was much slimmer than ours). Again this change in values was having an impact on children growing up and the values they aspired to.

The media

Professor Gammage cited the media as a powerful agent of both information and misinformation. He suggested that in terms of education the media was not effective at putting over sophisticated and complex ideas but tended to simplify information into manageable 'sound bites' . He suggested, for example, that perceptions of history were being distorted by this simplification. As he quoted, 'He who simplifies, simply lies'. He also saw the media as a powerful influence on the general publics attitudes to teaching and education, and again this sound bite mentality led politicians to say foolish things like 'I will not rest till all children are above average'!

The media also had a huge influence on children as they were key consumers, and much of their viewing included violence. The Gulbenkien Foundation survey had found that, on average four and five year olds watched 23 hours television a week and six year olds 40 hours. He noted that now that there was now in the USA a debate around censorship but concluded that the media, through its unfettered development. had brought the problems on itself. He noted the rise of the computer and commented on how this was also moving into the children's market.

Conflicts in beliefs and ideologies

Again Professor Gammage saw this as an area where change was affecting childhood. He felt that education was being driven by an ideology that did not have room for conflicts in beliefs and that this had replaced educational theory. As an example he posed the question, 'What is a standard'? He suggested that in the long run social cohesion may be more important than short term cognitive gain. He noted that the USA recognises that education performs social functions often missing in families and that this is built into the education system, but that this has not happened really here.

At the end of the presentation Professor Gammage had given us a most thought provoking picture of the changing role of childhood and left us with a great deal to think about.

Television is good for your kids, the unchanging world of childhood.

Dr Maire Messenger Davies, London College of Printing

As a change of format this year, the conference theme was taken on in the afternoon. Dr Messenger Davies talked about her research on children and television. She started by noting that children were living through a time of great change in media and culture. This was an area that changed and moved on more quickly than any other part of current life. This was an area she had been exploring in her research which had focused on children's perceptions of television. She highlighted certain strands from this.

Firstly she discussed the idea of development and questioned if we had a view of it in relation to TV. She also discussed the way television affects children developing understanding of fantasy and reality.

Secondly she suggested that children were using the metalinguistic awareness, their knowledge about how television worked to assist their understanding.

She developed this to suggest that the research showed that children were sophisticated viewers and did not always read television literally. The research showed that as children move beyond the age of seven they were very aware of the artistic demands of genre, and were able to understand these and the rules that applied to that genre. So for example they were very clear about the differences between commercials and programmes.

Thirdly she noted that their research had not come up with any particularly noticeable patterns in tastes and viewing habits for particular groups of children. She noted that children's individual differences and tastes seemed to be the prime influence on their viewing but that their favourite genre was 'dramatic stories'. She concluded that these on television served a similar role to stories in books and were an important part of children's development.

Dr Messenger Davies' session was followed by lively questions. This was followed by the AGM, and once again participants concluded that the GAEC conference had been a stimulating and enjoyable day.

Sue Pidgeon

The Aims of GAEC

As early childhood educators in contemporary Britain, we are witnessing what amounts to the vandalisation of a model of nursery education which has been emulated throughout the world. Should/could the Goldsmiths' Association for Early Childhood take a militant/campaigning stand in opposing central and local government initiatives which seem likely to work against the best interests of young children, families, communities and professionals? This question was raised in discussion at the close of our last AGM (1996). Since then, it has been discussed by the Steering Committee with reference to the GAEC Constitution. copies of the Constitution have now been circulated to all Members.

The Constitution makes clear our strictly educational brief. This distinguishes GAEC from campaigning groups like the National Campaign for Nursery Education (NCNE) and the Campaign for State Education (CASE). Many members of GAEC, including Officers are also members of NCNE and/or CASE. However, when acting as Officers of GAEC, Steering Committee Members may only wear their GAEC hat.

Our educational brief does not preclude our responding to Government consultations and the like - and we do - in educational terms. However, we cannot go on the offensive.

In order for GAEC to combine its educational with a campaigning brief, we would have to disassociate ourselves from Goldsmiths College, regroup under another title and constitution, and find a new base. There seems little point in so doing, given the existence of organisations like NCNE and CASE which we are free to join, particularly since networking is written into the constitution as one of our aims.

With this in mind we are producing, for circulation to Members, an annotated list of organisations both educational and campaigning related to our field of interest and would welcome information for inclusion from members. We need the name of the organisation, a contact name and/or address and a brief description of: aims; regular publications; activities etc. Please sent these to our Honorary Secretary, Geva Blenkin, at Goldsmiths College.

It has been very useful to the Steering Committee to have this issue raised. Some Steering Committee Members, like many Members of GAEC were not around when the Constitution was originally drawn up and this review has resulted in some clarification. Members of the Steering Committee hope Members will agree that networking is the way forward on this issue.

Pat Gura, Chair/Spring 1997

Anne R. Thomas

Not Now Bernard

by David McKee

This book was first published in 1980, since then it has been reprinted between fifteen and twenty times. Those children who first encountered Bernard are now in their twenties and in all likelihood will be introducing the ubiquitous monster to children in their own families; whilst in schools it takes pride of place in the reading curriculum of the majority of nursery and primary schools.

I first came across Not Now Bernard in 1981 when I was undertaking a piece of small scale research as part of a post-graduate course at the Institute of Education, London. I was exploring the role of children's early reading development. It involved, in part, reading picture books aloud to small groups of reception-aged children. The idea being that if I read to them they would 'read' the story back to me. Each child made their own choice. Karen, aged 4 years 10 months, chose Bernard. As with all the other young children I read aloud adopting an almost exaggerated attention to patterns of intonation, that is points of juncture, range of pitch and varieties of stress, all contributing to a meaningful interpretation of the story line. I wanted to discover whether reading aloud to children supported their early attempts to read for themselves.

Karen was experiencing Not Now Bernard for the first time and her interest and involvement, as I read to her, were very apparent. Then it was her turn to read to me. Suffice to say that she made a reluctant start, convinced that she could not 'read'. By about page five, however, her strategies became clearer. She had two main intentions: to find the tune on the page (the intonational patterning) and to make the text make sense which often involved the substitution of words or short phrases. What was striking me was the way in which she could match the words to the tune. Incidentally she had no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that Bernard was the monster.

Since that time in the early eighties Not Now Bernard has become part of my 'cannot manage without this book' collection. Whether I have been working in classrooms or with teachers on courses, Bernard has been and continues to be a frequent item on the agenda. What is it about this book that has made it a winner for seventeen years? David McKee has illustrated and written a book that has wide appeal. Whether one is two years old or a senior citizen like myself, it is possible to empathise with the main character. There is nothing more poignant in our lives than the experience of loneliness or of being a marginalised member of a group. Bernard helps us to recognise and come to understand these elements of the human condition and at the same time to value the way in which McKee favours those of us who at various times in our lives are vulnerable or susceptible to the gratuitous control of others.

I have a grandson, Thomas, who is just two years old. He has already joined the Bernard fan club, albeit he finds the monster a little disconcerting at the moment. The story goes on living: David McKee has written a modern classic.

Flickerbook

Leila Berg, 1997

Granta Books, London ISBN 1 86207 004 0

The Little Trials of Childhood and Children's Stratagies for dealing with them

Frances Chaput Waksler, 1996

The Falmer Press, London ISBN 0 7507 0454 3

These two very different books attempt a similar feat: that of presenting adult accounts of lived childhood experiences which capture the feeling of being a child in an adult world. The first is an autobiography, the second based on research.

> The colours! I shuffle along, not lifting my feet, because I have autumn leaves balanced on my shoes. I am on my way to school. I am five years old. (Flickerbook, p.10)

'Make everything happen as you say it'. This was Leila Berg's advice to storytellers in the introduction to her book of folktales, published in 1966 (1). Thirty years on, she has attempted to do just this in her autobiography **Flickerbook.** Rather than contemplate her younger self from the detached position of the adult she has become, she makes it happen, right there, on the page. She becomes three-year- old Leila, the narrator of her own story, telling it how it is for her. As she grows and develops and her horizons extend, so this is mirrored in the character and scope of the narrative.

Early childhood educators will perhaps best remember Leila Berg as the author of the **Little Pete** stories and the pioneering **Nippers** series of early reading books, which were unlike any we had ever seen before. For a start, they lacked the daftness of Janet and John. They respected the intelligence and diversity of developing readers. In style and content and in their portrayal of people, **Nippers** affirmed the existence of lives previously absent from Reading Book Land.

A 'flickerbook' is described as a:

> series of sequential pictures or photographs put on separate pieces of paper, one after the other. When the book was flipped quickly through, the pictures would provide the illusion of a moving picture.

This is the notion behind the title of her latest book. The effect is almost cinematic, especially if, as I did, you read it in one sitting. The re-lived fragments of a childhood remembered as loveless; the loves, lovers and increasing political awareness of adolescence and young womanhood, add up to a whole moving picture in every senses. Belonging, belief, compassion, contribution, courage, equality, humour and love are the subtexts which bind the whole and are reflected in all her work.

The early years fragments of **Flickerbook** centre on making sense of relationships, events, routines and adult turns of phrase which delight and intrigue young Leila, like when they visit the country and Mr Butterworth, their host, remarks: 'Those bellowing cows are mad drunk on windfalls.' (p.14).

Throughout, she movingly and sometimes hilariously conveys the tingling, sensual nature of living, learning and loving. In one of the saddest passages of the book for me, she describes her friend's coveted teddy-bear:

> Eta at No 24 has a teddy, a big one, an old one. It has an empty space near the top like one of Mr Barr's coal-sacks. And one of its ears is ripped, and the cotton hangs down. And one its eyes is a criss-cross trouser button. And the other one's lost. (p.12)

Leila's own doll is something called an 'heirloom' and made of porcelain. As with the adults in her early life, it is not for cuddling up to. When she goes to Eta's house, they swap.

One reviewer of **Flickerbook** (2) questions the validity of Leila Berg's presentation of her early childhood. Can an adult really tell it from a three-year-old's perspective? Implicit in Berg's account is the idea that a child of three can be objectively aware of her circumstances in the happening present. Is her account an act of imagination, rather than an exact description? Or a bit of both and does it matter? The research which Frances Chaput Waksler discusses in **The Little Trials of Childhood and Children's Strategies for Dealing with Them** suggests the legitimacy of what Leila Berg attempts.

Waksler asked her adult students, trainee early childhood educators, to think about what they found hard, unfair, difficult to cope with as a child, ie, the relatively minor trials to which the adults in their lives subjected them. They were asked to avoid making moral judgements and urged to 'attempt to recall the experiences as they were lived at the time' (p.9, original emphasis). The student's recollections tend to relate to experiences in the years between five and eight. Perhaps this says as much about adult-child relationships during these years as about the processes of recall. However, although less frequent in the data, the earlier years are represented, as in this passage in a section headed 'Activities Interrupted' (p.67).

> My earliest memory is of my third birthday. I remember standing on the table dancing and feeling powerful and strong while my relatives were all gathered round the table, applauding me and humming a birthday song. As the dining room door opened, my mother entered the room with a cake in her hands. My uncle took me off the table so that my mother could place the cake there. I was quite unhappy about being taken off the table. I was not done dancing. Everybody started eating cake while I sat there scheming how I might get myself back onto that table. (Ruth)

I don't pretend to understand the cognitive/ affective processes involved in three-year-old Ruth's recalling of both an event which took place in childhood and her consciousness of her own state of mind during it. Casual observation suggests that memory flashes and flickers from the earliest years can and do occur, sometimes triggered by chance, at others deliberately sought. They tend to relate to events experienced with great intensity. Perhaps the emotionally charged nature of some events, particularly those involving other people, creates moments of heightened awareness of the self? And perhaps this makes such experiences more recoverable than others?

Waksler argues that our understandings of childhood tend to be based on top-down views; that by and large we are unaware of the lived experiences of childhood. Since we have all been children, this is odd, but true. Why might it be so? Firstly, it suits us as adults to view children from our own perspective. Secondly, doing what Leila Berg has done in her book and Frances Chaput Waksler asks of her students, is difficult and often painful and not without risk to the person remembering and the people in their lives, past and present. Waksler advises caution in disclosing recollections to those who might be hurt by them. Berg, in a recent interview describes becoming three again as 'very harrowing' and the whole process as exhausting (3).

Despite the nature of some of the material in the books, neither presents children as victims. In both, they are depicted as strong, active players in creating not only strategies for meeting and dealing with life's trials but also opportunities for themselves.

Does it matter whether Berg and Waksler have offered objectively true , insider accounts of childhood? Waksler sees her students' recollections as accounts of 'possible childhood experiences' (p.13, original emphasis) from children's perspectives, which may be used as a resource in reflecting on adult-child relationships. Given the tentative status of most of our 'knowledge' about childhood and the workings of mind we can well afford to entertain such possibilities.

In the book of folktales mentioned at the beginning of this review, Leila Berg offers this golden rule to storytellers: whenever you tell a tale, always begin it with the words 'And this is the way I tell it'. Perhaps they should have been inscribed on the fly-leaf of **Flickerbook.**

NOTES

(1) ***Folktales for Reading and Telling,*** Leila Berg, 1966 Brockhampton, Leicester

(2) Independent on Sunday, Ben Rogers (review) 26.1.97

(3) Times Educational Supplement, Jonathan Croall (review) 14.2.97, p.6

Pat Gura , the new Chair of GAEC, lectures at Roehampton Institute

Video: Early Literacy Education with Parents

A framework for practice

University of Sheffield/Sheffield Education Authority

Reviewed by Judith Stevens

> "The school classroom isn't the only place where children learn about reading and writing...the roots of literacy learning are in a child's early years before school"

So begins the commentary on this wonderful video which has been produced as part of the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) project - a joint University of Sheffield and Sheffield Education Authority initiative.

'Early Literacy Education with Parents' is aimed at teachers and other early childhood educators who wish to develop their work with parents to promote early literacy. The video itself is well produced and very user friendly.It has been filmed in a wide variety of very believable home,neighbourhood, school and library settings which reflect our diverse community. The whole twenty-four minutes of film are crammed full of information and practical guidance. The video's great appeal is that viewers can relate to the 'real-life' situations and link these to their own experiences.

The video is designed for use on professional development and initial training courses,as well as in school or centre based development work. I have used it equally successfully in whole school staff meetings and INSET for nursery teachers and nursery nurses. The content is informative, very practical and extremely motivating for early years practitioners. The whole feel of the video is that it is possible to work successfully with parents - many professionals after viewing have felt inspired to review their school/centre policy /practice on parental involvement and to plan accordingly.

The video is based on the premise that literacy and the role of parents are key considerations in the early years.Questions are raised about how practice can be developed :

- which aspects of early literacy development can best be nurtured?
- what are the best ways of working with parents?
- how can parents be more involved?
- how can work be planned and evaluated?

There is advice on how work with parents can be planned for the different strands of literacy:

- environmental print;
- books;
- early writing;
- oral language.

There are practical, achievable examples of parents working to support their children's literacy development in each of these areas.

One key feature of the video is the idea of the **ORIM** framework. This includes the four vital aspects of the parents' role:

- parents can provide **O**pportunities for literacy in everyday life, these can take the form of events,materials,space,time - in short, permission to do things;

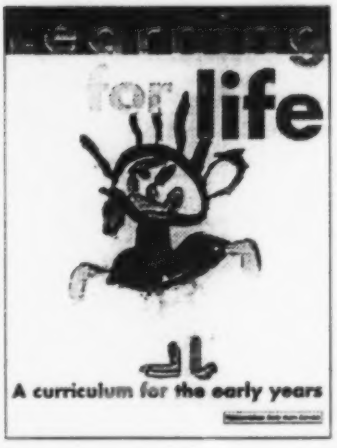
- they can give **R**ecognition of the child's achievements through praise,telling others about the child's successes, photographs and saving paintings/drawings;

- parents can **I**nteract with children,talking about what they are doing, involving them in real tasks,playing games;

- finally, parents can provide **M**odels for literacy, reading with children or writing postcards or shopping lists.

All in all, this video reminds early years educators of the essential, key role of parents as children's first educators. It provides practical, no-nonsense advice about ways staff can empower parents to support their children's literacy development. Whatever stage a school or centre is at in the development of a parental involvement policy, this video will assist staff in reviewing present practice and planning for the future.

'Early Literacy Education with Parents'
costs £25 + VAT + post and packing
available from: Steve Collier
Sheffield University Television
5 Favell Road
Sheffield
S3 7QX



Learning for Life

A curriculum for the early years
London Borough of Lewisham,
Early Years Service
£35.00 plus postage and packing

Clare Kelly

This guide to the early years curriculum was written by a team of educators and advisory staff in the London Borough of Lewisham. It is aimed at all practitioners working in education and care settings and offers detailed advice and guidance on the provision of a rich and stimulating environment where young children can build on what they already know.

The document has as its starting point that children are active learners who need to construct their own view of the world through first hand experience. The view of early learning that is offered has a sound theoretical base which is related to day to day practice in early years settings in a clear, straightforward and accessible way.

It begins with an equal opportunities statement, an affirmation of the foundations of good early years practice and a section on the importance of play, complete with high quality colour photographs with captions to reinforce the text. The following sections follow a logical sequence beginning with the seven areas of learning identified in the Ofsted handbook but with the addition of the word 'emotional' to 'human and social development'. The following pages consider the knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes to be fostered within each area and the role of the adult is also carefully documented. The next section focuses on provision and organisation of the learning environment with detailed guidance including a list of questions to help staff evaluate their own practice.

There is also a section which looks at overarching issues such as partnership with parents/ carers, equal opportunities, SEN, the needs of bilingual children and child protection. The final part part of the document focuses on planning and record keeping. There is a comprehensive range of examples of planning frameworks and exemplars of both planned and spontaneous observations.

With well over one hundred pages and nine sections, the document is long, but its scope, the clarity of content and its design (in a binder) make it an ideal starting point for staff discussion and INSET. Its use in this way is supported by the last section which offers prompts to support staff in becoming more reflective in evaluating and developing their own practice.

The practical focus of this document stems from an understanding of child development and a recognition of research into how young children learn.

At a time when early years practice is often under attack, a document such as this would also be useful in helping to explain to parents and others why we do what we do.

Available from LBL Early Years Service tel 0181 695 6000 ext 8072

96

So Much

Trish Cooke,
Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury
Walker Books, 1994

Gina Kent

So Much tells the story of a baby and his Mum waiting at home for the arrival of Dad to celebrate his birthday with a surprise party. During their wait for the party to begin various family members arrive and the text repeats,

"They weren't doing anything,

Mum and the baby, nothing really"

Then

"DING DONG!"

Each new family member brings their own greeting

"Oooooooh!"

"Hello, Hello."

"Yoooooo hoooooo! Yoooooo hoooooo!"

accompanied by how they wish to express their love for the baby:

"I want to squeeze him...

I want to kiss him...

I want to eat him...

I want to fight him...SO MUCH!"

Helen Oxenbury's illustrations fill the page with lively colour and fun, whilst reflecting up to date styles and culture that accompany and complement the text. The baby's responses to the next arrival are shown in a black and white drawing at the end of the section of text introducing the new character. To reflect the duller moments, that waiting for something to happen can contain, "...they weren't doing anything ..."the illustrations are smaller and contain less colour building anticipation into the story.

The repetitive text and sequencing that the story builds on makes it an ideal book for listening to and for joining in with. Children show empathy with the baby as the feelings expressed are meaningful and have relevance to them. The characters are lifelike and both do and say things that are typical of people when in the company of small children "... with his eyebrow raise high, high, high and his lips scrunch up small, small, small ..., and they hug him and they love him and they make him feel so cosy ... ".

Although Standard English prevails throughout, Trish Cooke uses some features of Creole in the text. A feature of Creole is the repetition of adjectives a number of times for emphasis:

"Auntie Bibba came inside with her arms wide, wide, wide, and one big big smile. Uncle Didi came inside with his eyebrows raise high, high, high and his lips scrunch up small, small, small."

Another feature of Creole is the absence of the marker used to denote the past in English:

"He flip-flap him over till he nearly drop him."

The choice of words reflect those used by Creole speakers, for example the description of the Grandmothers' handbags:

> "... cock up to one side and their brolly hook up on their sleeve."

Creole does not often feature in children's literature being more often found in traditional tales and in poetry. 'So Much', then, is a useful addition to bookshelves especially for reading aloud.

I have read this book in a variety of story groupings and it is always a popular and often requested. I have asked children for their thoughts on the book and here are some of their comments:

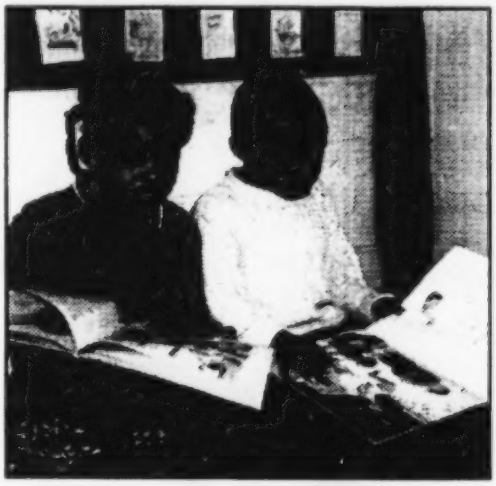
"I like Uncle Didi and I try to raise my eyebrows high, look, can I do it? My Uncle swings me about and I squeal like the baby. I like the book."(boy, 3.9 years).

"It's good, it makes me smile, I've got it at home and my Mum reads it to me. One day we will have a surprise party for my Dad and I will help get it ready."(girl, 4.4 years)

"I like it when they are all waiting, waiting for the next person to come ... the bell goes DING DONG in big letters and I know there is an exciting bit to come next. I don't want the baby to go to bed though."(boy 4.6 years)

And finally, to end this review, I happened upon two children in the quiet room reading the book to each other, taking it in turns to read a page each, they were able to name all the characters correctly and in sequence and knew all the key features of the repetitive text.

They were so absorbed with the text, with the illustrations and their reading that they were totally unaware of my presence or the fact that I had taken a photograph of them. When they had finished reading the story, I asked them what they liked about the book, one of them told me, quite simply, "I can read it that's why I like it."What finer accolade for a book from two children only just four?



Creole - the word Creole is derived from a Portuguese word and was first used in the West Indian context to refer to the descendants of settlers in the West Indies. The term is now widely used to refer to the languages spoken by the descendants of African slaves and the many other nationalities who have inhabited the islands. The word Creole is now attached to a number of European languages as in French Creole, English Creole or Dutch Creole. Further reading see Barbara Graham,"Creole and its implications in the classroom", in, Language Matters, Language Diversity, CLPE, 1996/7 No.1.

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